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# THE LOUISIANA HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

Vol. 33, No. 1

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## McDonogh Anniversary Number

300 John McDonogh: Man of Many Facets.

Veterans Versus Churchwardens.

Book Review: A La Poursuite des Aigles.

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# THE LOUISIANA HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

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## JOHN McDONOGH: MAN OF MANY FACETS

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*by*

DR. ARTHUR G. NUHRAH

*Research Historian, Tulane University of Louisiana.*

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### INTRODUCTION

#### MCDONOGH IN LEGEND AND HISTORY\*

With the recent appearance of another novel, allegedly based on the life of John McDonogh, the old, melodramatic legends surrounding one of our foremost educational philanthropists have been polished, dressed in gaudy tinsel, and paraded before the world. This process has been repeated many times in the past. It is no small wonder, therefore, that the McDonogh so familiar to the people of this city is almost entirely a mythical character bearing little resemblance to the historical figure who lived and worked in New Orleans more than one hundred years ago. Although many New Orleanians may be startled to hear the statement, it is nonetheless true that only the legendary McDonogh is known to most people today.

It is my hope that before you depart tonight you will have a clearer and more accurate portrayal of the man than has ever been revealed before. In order to do that, however, it will be necessary for me to outline briefly the legends about John McDonogh.

You have been told that he arrived in New Orleans in October, 1800, leaving his ship somewhere below the city and completing the journey on horseback, that he returned to Baltimore before making his permanent home here. The story of his gay social life in the mansion on Chartres and Toulouse has been told with relish by

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\* Paper read before a meeting of The Louisiana Historical Society.

every McDonogh writer from Alexander Walker to Harnett Kane. And who has not shed a few tears over the melancholy tales of thwarted love, or failed to suffer with McDonogh as he bore the scorn of Micaëla Almonester? How beautiful, too, is the tender romance with Susan Johnston, whom McDonogh lost because of religious differences and then loved from a distance, as his sweetheart dedicated her life to service in Ursuline Convent. Recall, if you will, the visits to the Convent and the red roses of New Year's Eve.

The dark clouds of adversity gather swiftly, the heavens rumble and lightning flashes earthward. McDonogh's world has crumbled into ruins and he has fled to a little "box" across the river, where he spends the next thirty-three years in comfortless, lonely, secluded poverty. In McDonoghville he lived as a recluse, working from dawn to midnight, shunning society, receiving no visitors, reading no papers, and squeezing every cent with a miser's fanaticism. What child cannot retell the story of his being rowed across the river to save ferry fare and of his walking to avoid spending a nickel for the omnibus?

"His estate was the largest in the world," breathe his awed biographers. "Why it covered fifty miles frontage on the Mississippi and encompassed four-fifths of all the swamplands in Louisiana!" It entirely surrounded New Orleans and reached the astronomical figure of millions of acres. Land fever burned like malarial fire in McDonogh's blood; he purchased property with relentless singleness of purpose, but never sold one foot of the acres he had gathered unto himself.

More than a few writers have told the world about the illegitimate children he sired and of his attempts to educate them. Remember Gertrude and Frank Pena? Didn't McDonogh bless Gertrude's marriage with a handsome cash gift and didn't he leave \$100,000 to Frank, in a codicil that had been safeguarded for the boy by Rezin D. Shepherd, McDonogh's life-long friend?

Finally, age and disease took their toll and McDonogh breathed his last, unwept, unattended, and reduced to a skeleton because of his frugal diet. But the day of reckoning was near at hand. The contents of his will, a curious document made entirely by himself, in greatest secrecy, were revealed and overnight the city set him up on a pedestal and honored his memory.



In the court battle over his will, New Orleans and Baltimore stood together valiantly and harmoniously to defend their right against the greedy states. Of all the lawyers engaged by the cities, none played a more honorable or important role than Christian Roselius.

The foregoing account makes a beautiful tragic drama, doesn't it? Yes, the traditional story of McDonogh's life is sensational. What, then, is wrong with it? Only this: there is not one single word of truth in the entire story, from beginning to end. It is nothing but a luxuriant, tangled growth of fiction that covers and hides the drab, rough-hewn stones of truth as ivy buries an old wall within its foliage. Before the truth can be brought to the light of day, the clinging tendrils of fiction must be cut away, slowly, patiently, using great care lest the stones beneath be damaged beyond recovery. Sometimes the searcher after truth finds stones missing, or else the passage of time has crumbled the hard core of fact so that it has become indistinguishably mixed with the dust of fiction.

In the case of John McDonogh's life and work, enough of the factual structure remained to make the task a fruitful, rewarding one. For my own part I began an intensive study of the subject five years ago, beginning, as was natural, with a mass of erroneous ideas about him. It was not easy to discard the pictures that had been with me since childhood, but the step, however painful, was made during those years of research. The materials were abundant, yet so widely scattered that the mere task of locating them took up much of my time. For those persons who like to examine newspaper files, I might point out that more than three hundred articles or items about McDonogh can be found in New Orleans newspapers alone, for the period 1800 through 1950. As for periodical articles, more than forty have already been found, ranging in quality from the utterly worthless fiction of Alexander Walker's "John McDonogh the Millionaire," to Lewis Atherton's scholarly study of McDonogh's commercial activities.

Former headmasters at McDonogh School, near Baltimore, Maryland, have published books on the founder of their institution. James T. Edwards wrote *Some Interesting Papers of John McDonogh* and *Personal Appearance and Some Memorials of John McDonogh*. William T. Childs authored the interesting

biography, *John McDonogh, His Life and Work*. Equally helpful, and perhaps more reliable than these three publications, are four master's theses at the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University. Each thesis deals with a phase of McDonogh's career. Then of course, there are scattered references to McDonogh in hundreds of books, historical periodicals, newspapers, encyclopedias, and popular magazines.

To the avid historical researcher, all of the above sources pale into insignificance before the priceless treasure of the original McDonogh papers—the magic key that opens the gates of a wonderland of fact more exciting than fiction. It is from these papers that I have gathered a large file of authenticated facts which have formed the core of my three-volume biography of John McDonogh. Perhaps, within two or three years, a condensed version of this biography will be published so that all of you might share with me the true story of a famous man. Be that as it may, the papers themselves are worthy of study. Tulane University possesses the largest group of McDonogh documents in the world, totaling several thousand items. Mr. John Minor Wisdom of New Orleans owns the second most important collection—a gem of carefully selected items. The third largest collection rests in the archives of Duke University. Surprisingly enough, virtually nothing of a documentary nature can be found in Maryland or in the Library of Congress.

McDonogh was born in that Maryland city on December 29, 1779. His father was "Honest John" McDonogh, a pious old Scot who owned a brickyard in South Baltimore, and who dabbled occasionally in real estate speculations. The boy, like his parents before him, received the equivalent of a grammar school education, liberally seasoned with Calvinistic ideals. Later in life McDonogh spoke with pride of his "sainted mother" who "early taught" him "to bend the knee, night and day, in prayer to the Almighty." He loved his father, too, and frequently boasted of the Revolutionary War service of McDonogh Senior. Unfortunately, no records of this military tour of duty can be found. The same lack of proof casts a shadow of doubt over the family legend that Mrs. McDonogh in her girlhood was held captive for a time by hostile Indians.

All but peaceful redskins had long since disappeared from the hilly countryside of Baltimore county when McDonogh reached his

teens. He was a tall, thin boy with an unruly mop of thick, curly brown hair, dark brown eyes, a fair, freckled complexion, and a prominent nose. In an odd way he was handsome but the thin, tightly compressed lips foreshadowed the harsher elements of his character. People early commented on his eyes. In repose they were limpid, almost kindly. Whenever the youth was aroused, those eyes became darker, flashing, and agate-hard. His voice was soft, well-modulated, and most pleasant when he sang the hymns the little singing school in Baltimore had taught him.

His voice, his willingness to work hard, and his obvious qualities of leadership so impressed William Taylor that the wealthy merchant hired him as an apprentice. At this time he was sixteen or seventeen years of age. William Osborne Payne, a slightly younger man, held a position just above McDonogh, even as late as 1799, and sent his subordinate on numerous errands for the firm. Perhaps William Taylor deliberately allowed this in order to tame the proud, aggressive spirit of the boy to the point where he might be trusted with a foreign assignment and at the same time obey implicitly the instructions of his employer, even after he was no longer within the latter's direct supervision.

Early in the spring of 1800, William Taylor felt that the moment had arrived when the fledgling trader might try his wings. McDonogh was sent to Liverpool with a cargo of flour, cotton, and logwood. The sights and sounds of a great port in time of war must have thrilled him. The cargo of raw materials disposed of, the ship took on wine, pottery, silk, and kitchenware destined for the trade in New Orleans, where McDonogh was to establish a branch for the firm of John and William Taylor. There were no mishaps on the voyage to Louisiana, although rough seas made the young supercargo ill part of the time. Finally the mouth of the Mississippi River was reached, and the slow trip up to New Orleans began. McDonogh looked at the endless expanse of swamp and shuddered. It was so wild and desolate! He had no thought of leaving the vessel before it docked. It was about the middle of September, 1800, when he arrived in the city that was to be his home for fifty years.

At first the stench of the place nauseated him and its barbaric strangeness caused a wave of homesickness to dampen his spirits. A bath, a rest, and the taste thrill of highly seasoned foods lifted his spirits; he began to take more intelligent notice of his sur-



roundings. Even before the ship's cargo had been unloaded, McDonogh visited the offices of Lanthois & Pitot, agents for William Taylor. Brusquely he identified himself, stated his business, and demanded an immediate accounting of Taylor's goods in their hands. The conservative old gentlemen were taken aback by this brash, pushing Yankee. In a letter dated September 28, 1800, they hinted that they had not liked young McDonogh. He was too opinionated, too self-confident — and such lack of tact! Why he seemed to distrust them as if they planned to rob him.

Taylor must have sighed wearily when he read this letter. Alas! It seemed as if young John would never learn to curb his aggressiveness or his suspicion of others. In time the kindly merchant was to regret that he had ever placed his own trust in McDonogh. Within four years he had more than \$260,000 worth of goods with the New Orleans branch and unwise speculations brought threats of bankruptcy. While Taylor's fortunes languished, McDonogh's flourished. By 1805 the young man was worth a modest fortune and owned full warehouses.

How did he make his first fortune? The solution to this question remained undiscovered for a century. It was my great good luck to find, on one of my research trips, sixty-seven volumes of business correspondence of William Taylor. Among the thousands of documents were thirteen letters from Rezin D. Shepherd to the Baltimore trader. In these epistles, Shepherd detailed the business activities of McDonogh and gave the only statistical account of his early dealings that is known to exist. Those remarkable letters portray McDonogh as a secretive, opportunistic, ungrateful, aggressive man who used his former employer as a stepping stone to success. While Taylor pleaded for cash remittances to avert financial disaster, McDonogh made heavy drafts, as much as \$30,000 at a time, on Taylor's firm and used this money to speculate in sugar which he shipped to New York and Philadelphia. He purchased fine quality, dry sugar for his own account and sent bad sugar to Taylor. At the same time he speculated in lands and traded in Negro slaves. Nor would he allow Taylor to share in his successful ventures. Rather, he tried to keep his dealings secret.

Shepherd characterized him as "one of the most ungrateful of men" and declared that he was too eager to make a fortune. Eventually Taylor severed business relations with McDonogh, but

by this time the latter had retired from commerce and was devoting his attention to planting and to land speculation. It seems that he had treated Taylor rather shabbily. One must admit in his defense that he was the only one who did not abandon the old man when he suffered bankruptcy in 1815-1816. Taylor was invited to make his home with McDonogh and did so in 1817.

Even McDonogh's parents felt the hard insistence of his ambition. One by one he drew from them their stalwart young sons to work for him in New Orleans. But he was a harsh disciplinarian, and an exacting taskmaster — every brother quarreled bitterly with him and departed. That is, all except his baby brother, William. Of all his family, McDonogh loved Billy most deeply. For years he tried to wrest from Elizabeth Wilkins McDonogh this child of her old age. Only her tears and entreaties stiffened McDonogh Senior's determination to avoid a parting. "Do you mean to encourage all my sons to leave me?" the father wrote bitterly. "To part with Billy is the same to me as the loss of all my sons." Not until 1809, after both of his parents were dead, was McDonogh able to claim his youngest brother.

In his own peculiar way, McDonogh showered affection on Billy, dressed him in fine clothes, hired the best tutors, and saw that he had a gentleman's training in dancing and fencing. What high hopes he had of producing a cultured scholar! William preferred a business career and his brother reluctantly gave his consent. Blessed with a pleasing personality, William made friends as fast as he made money. A promising future lay before him—a future that was cut short by an untimely death. On June 15th, 1832, McDonogh had supped with Billy who seemed in best of health and spirits. Less than twenty-four hours later, a sweat-stained messenger placed a note in McDonogh's hands. It read: "Your Brother William is now lying at the point of death unless [you] come Immediately you will not see him alive." Asiatic cholera had claimed another victim. McDonogh never recovered from this profound shock, as is proved by his increasing preoccupation with thoughts of death and the grave.

An emotional experience almost as great was the cause of his much discussed removal from New Orleans to the plantation in McDonoghville on the opposite bank of the river. In order to ingratiate himself with the ruling class and to make the proper business contacts with the social elite, McDonogh donned the garb

of a dandy and played the role of *bon vivant*. It was an opportunistic move, just as was his assumption of Spanish citizenship prior to the acquisition of Louisiana by the United States. McDonogh gave lavish parties and in turn attended the highest social functions. But his home was in the suburb St. Mary, the American section, not in the Vieux Carré. The heady wine of social pleasure intoxicated him and he gave himself up to the fashionable dissipations of that day, including the keeping of one or more mistresses.

Then came yellow fever epidemics, war, and the death of many friends. Serious illness struck him, too, and his life was despaired of. More than ever now he turned to the nearly-forgotten moral admonitions of his parents and to the rules of guidance for his life. McDonogh experienced a religious awakening and a psychological revulsion against his former sinful way of life. The salvation of his soul became a burning question. Furthermore, as one of the elect and a divinely ordained steward whose task was to gather wealth for the poor, he had failed his God. Only by fleeing from New Orleans and its fleshpots could he fulfill his high destiny: therefore, he moved to his plantation home in McDonoghville.

There was no case of unrequited love in this decision. Absolutely no proof exists for the Micaëla Almonester love affair. Micaëla married in 1811. At that time McDonogh was not the colossus of his later years. It is not probable that the haughty young aristocrat even gave a serious thought to McDonogh or ever invited him to her home. And those who speak of a meeting in a lawyer's office in the 1840's and a lawsuit over a piece of property can bring forth no document to substantiate their story.

Equally ridiculous is the Susan Johnston love story. The authorities at Ursuline Convent vehemently deny that the legend has any basis in truth. Mother Angela's papers have been carefully examined by them. They have found nothing to indicate that she ever granted an interview to McDonogh. Nor did she become Mother Superior. The origin of this legend can be explained. McDonogh corresponded with a Miss Maria Johnston, a boyhood friend of his, in Baltimore. In 1840 or 1841 she paid a visit to New Orleans and then returned. Gossips saw the two together and began to talk about a love affair. And when it was



learned that McDonogh visited Ursuline Convent to inquire about the education of orphans he had befriended, the gossips had a sensational new twist to their synthetic romance.

At his home in McDonoghville, McDonogh lived the life of a gentleman farmer. His rooms were clean, well furnished, and compact. He ate the best of foods and kept fine liquors on his shelves. Receipts found among his papers prove that he was partial to high-quality meats, delicacies, and imported wines. He dined off a mahogany table set with imported porcelain and Irish linen. He used heavy sterling silver tableware. His clothes were expensive, if out-dated, for he paid as much as \$35 for a coat.

Nor was he too stingy to buy newspapers or too busy to read them. He subscribed to the *Courier*, the *Commercial Bulletin*, the *Argus*, the *Bee*, and the *Daily Picayune*. And he read them carefully for tax sales, notices of auctions, or criticisms hurled at him by his contemporaries. Any attack printed by a local paper brought a swift retort from the great landowner. As for his using a slave to row him across the river to save ferry fare, that is a baseless slander. Not until the 1830's was a regular ferry service established, and its landing was about one-half mile below his home. It was at first necessary, and then more convenient, to be rowed across. His refusal to ride the omnibus or a cab was not dictated by stinginess, but resulted from his ideas of exercise as an aid to health. McDonogh regarded walking as one of the best forms of exercise available for the preservation of a sound body.

McDonogh was neither a miser nor a recluse. Throughout his life he gave sums as high as \$1000 to charity and paid for the education of more than ten young people. He educated his brothers, one of his sisters, and several of his nieces. Most of us are familiar with the remarkable story of his manumission of valuable slaves. Those Negro servants loved him dearly and addressed him as "Father." He gave his name to some of them, stood as godfather to slave children and sent two of them to Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, to be educated. In order to help his slaves he liberally supported the African Colonization societies.

I have traced McDonogh's movements month by month from 1817 until the time of his death on October 26, 1850, and the evidence explodes forever the legend that he was a recluse.

During that entire period, except when he was ill or had been forced indoors by the weather, he rarely stayed home more than a few weeks at a time. He made hundreds of trips to every part of the state, looking after his property, visiting friends, advising his lawyers, and inspecting lands offered for sale. The object of some of his travels was purely social pleasure; he delighted particularly in dining with Andrew Durnford, a free colored planter, whose son, Thomas, was his godchild. Thomas sometimes vacationed at McDonogh's home, where he met a few of the visitors, both men and women, who came from other states to visit his godfather.

When free from his medical studies, Thomas helped McDonogh with the management of his landholdings. He knew, as did few people, how ridiculous were the exaggerated public reports of McDonogh's estate. The eccentric old gentleman had very little cash—most of his fortune was tied up in unproductive swamplands. Instead of millions of acres, the most that McDonogh could call his own was 700,000 acres, and about 200,000 of these were in dispute as to title. As for the tale of his owning fifty miles frontage on the Mississippi—utterly impossible! However that might be, McDonogh meant to accomplish great good with his holdings. Thomas knew this, as did several others including Sarah Bella, wife of Justice John McLean of Ohio, and the Quaker, William McKenney. He had told them in a general way about the provisions of his will; consequently, they spoke of him as a philanthropist.

You might be led to assume, from what I have said, that McDonogh was an angelic character—all sweetness and light. Nothing could be further from the truth. The man is a mass of contradictions and cannot be placed in any one category. He was capable of extreme human tenderness and deeply religious emotion at one time and of cold, brutal avarice at another. He gave ample cause to New Orleanians to hate him. They saw him spurn the beggars in the streets, or foreclose on a hapless debtor, or deprive a widow and her fatherless children of their property. In nearly every business transaction, he exacted his pound of flesh. Some idea of the intense hatred felt for him can be gained when one reads articles published after his death. The hot wave of hate strikes the reader as forcibly as a blast of superheated air from a suddenly opened furnace door. Many people saw no reason to

change their opinions after his will was read. Some of the most savage attacks on his character were printed more than a year after his death. It is clear that the reverence with which he is regarded now is the result of the passage of time, the benefits of the school system financed with his bequest, and the ceaseless propaganda that has grown out of the Founder's Day ceremonies.

McDonogh died of Asiatic cholera. This disease produces a severe dehydration of the tissues of the body: hence, its victims sometimes are reduced to a skeletal appearance. This was the case with the deceased philanthropist. That unknown news reporter who sneered that he deliberately robbed the worms of a feast might have practiced the precepts of Christian charity.

Most of McDonogh's dreams collapsed with his death. His complex will, by which he sought to immortalize his name through a mighty charitable trust and to maintain control of his estate from beyond the grave, was torn to shreds by the courts. Much of his wealth was lost in years of litigation. The man partly responsible for this debacle was Christian Roselius, an authority on civil law, who callously advised McDonogh to insert in his will strict prohibitions against the alienation of his property. Roselius knew that this was contrary to law and would be certain to bring on a bitter legal struggle. He profited from the attacks on the will. His fees alone were more than \$30,000. To make matters worse, New Orleans and Baltimore quarreled over the spoils after they had repelled the challenge of the states. New Orleans tried to tax Baltimore's share, while the Maryland port city refused to pay half of a fee of \$100,000 due Roselius and three other attorneys. Roselius advised New Orleans to pay the entire fee and then sue her sister city for \$50,000. This was done and the man who appeared to defend Baltimore was Christian Roselius! He argued that the huge fee was paid for superfluous legal services. Needless to say, the amazed judge decided against Baltimore.

In the case of the Francis Pena codicil, the courts awarded more than \$100,000 to Pena on the strength of a stained, crumpled, nearly illegible scrap of paper. Rezin Shepherd had never seen the codicil for it had always been in Pena's possession. I am convinced that it was a forgery. Who was Francis Pena? He was *not* the illegitimate son of McDonogh. Actually, he was an orphan whom



McDonogh had befriended. He was shiftless, dishonest, a ne'er-do-well, and a trouble-maker. His sister, Gertrude, angered McDonogh in some way and at the time of her marriage her benefactor was not on speaking terms with her. There is no evidence that she was ever forgiven by John McDonogh.

An unforgiving attitude was only one of the many faults of McDonogh; he had others of far more serious nature. Clearly, then, he was not a great man, but he was a man of great ideas, and possessed an astonishing versatility. Landowner, planter, trader, speculator, scientist, soldier, politician, colonizationist, educator, and Calvinist divine — McDonogh had been all of these persons in the span of fifty years. For example, he was an amateur doctor, tending to his slaves during epidemics and employing a medicinal steam bath. As a chemist he experimented with paints and mortars. In the field of geology he studied the formation of river deltas and saw clearly that periodic overflows raised the beds of swamplands. Among other things, he read foreign-language works on hydrostatics. As a result of his calculations he advocated a spillway at Bonnet Carré, 116 years before one was built. A kinsman of the modern sociologist, he praised education as a means of lessening crime and poverty. He believed in white supremacy and in rugged individualism. All in all, he was a spiritual twin of another famous Scotsman, Andrew Carnegie. We owe McDonogh a debt of gratitude, whatever the faults of his character, for his faith in education saved the schools of our city.

[The following are several chapters from Dr. Nuhrah's unpublished study of McDonogh. They have been selected because of their new documentary evidence which dissipates the shadows and distortions of legend and enables us for the first time, completely to assay that harsh zealot and erratic genius. Ed. Note]

## CHAPTER I

### FROM APPRENTICE TO SUCCESSFUL TRADER

"When not quite sixteen years of age, young John McDonogh became apprenticed to Mr. William Taylor, whose mercantile house was located at No. 8 Bank Street, Baltimore, Maryland.

Mr. Taylor was at that time one of Baltimore's foremost merchants."<sup>1</sup> The original indenture contract apparently has been lost, but it was quoted in full by William T. Childs,<sup>2</sup> and all subsequent writers have used his version. An agreement had been reached prior to the formal contract, for the five-year term of the apprenticeship began on December 9, 1795, although the contracting parties did not sign the paper until February 6, 1796.<sup>3</sup>

As was customary in laws governing such cases, John McDonogh, Sr., gave his consent and his son declared that his action was based on his own free will. In return for faithful performance of his duties, the apprentice was to receive a small salary and was to be trained in the "'art, trade, and mystery'" of his master. There were pious prohibitions against drinking, gambling, immorality, and dishonesty. McDonogh's father was obligated to supply the young man with food, clothing, "'and all necessary expenses.'"<sup>4</sup> An arrangement such as this frequently encouraged a warm, personal relationship between master and apprentice, with social and intellectual benefits for the latter.

Undoubtedly the alert, ambitious youth made the most of the situation for he had entered Taylor's service at a time when American trade was experiencing the exciting stimulus of European wars. Nothing is known concerning the nature of his duties or of his relations with fellow workers, and the first document bearing his signature as an employee of Taylor was dated more than two years after his indenture began.<sup>5</sup> Most writers, dazzled by McDonogh's later success and fame, have overemphasized the importance of his position in the firm during those early years

<sup>1</sup> Childs, *John McDonogh*, 3-4. The fact that Taylor's firm was located at No. 8 Bank Street can be corroborated by a letter in the McDonogh Papers at Tulane. See William Norrie to McDonogh, December 17, 1829, McDonogh Papers. Lewis E. Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History* (Baton Rouge), VII (November, 1941), 457, n. 16, cited Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 8, n. 1, as his authority for the statement that William "Taylor, a native of Barnstable, Massachusetts, had entered business in Baltimore in 1783 and developed an extensive trade with Europe, the West Indies, and Spanish America." Atherton's study of McDonogh's merchandising activities is the most accurate and comprehensive work on this phase of McDonogh's life. The author has depended heavily on it for the bulk of this chapter. John Smith Whitaker, *Sketches of Life and Character in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1847), 68-69, gave what was probably an anecdotal story of Taylor's first acquaintance with McDonogh. According to Whitaker, Taylor met McDonogh one day when the lad was playing in a brickyard. The Baltimore merchant was struck by the brightness and intelligence of the youth and took him as an apprentice in his firm.

<sup>2</sup> Childs, *John McDonogh*, 4-5. See Appendix A for the full contract as quoted in Childs. The author made a research trip to Maryland in August, 1949, but was unable to locate several important documents, including the indenture contract.

<sup>3</sup> This is the author's own interpretation based on the dates given in the contract.

<sup>4</sup> Childs, *John McDonogh*, 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Legal document concerning the dissolution of John Blackford and Company, dated March 5, 1798, Taylor Papers, IX.

prior to his departure from Baltimore. The available evidence seems to indicate that McDonogh occupied a subordinate clerical position as late as the summer of 1799.<sup>6</sup>

This fact did not prevent McDonogh from applying himself with more than ordinary zeal to the mastering of the fundamentals of merchandising. Nor was Taylor oblivious of his worth, "for shortly before or after the expiration of his indenture in 1800, and while he was still a young man of only twenty-one, Taylor sent him to New Orleans to handle the latter's business in that port."<sup>7</sup>

The stage was an ample one for the unfolding of McDonogh's trading genius—expansion and rapid growth were congenial elements in his chosen profession.<sup>8</sup> "As Taylor's agent, McDonogh was expected to dispose of such goods as Taylor sent to New Orleans, and to remit the proceeds in various articles of commerce available locally. McDonogh, of course, would receive the customary commissions for effecting such business, and it is very likely that he also hoped to contribute a small part of the capital for the conduct of the trade as time went on."<sup>9</sup>

Somewhere in the city of New Orleans McDonogh rented a store<sup>10</sup> and prepared to match wits with Creoles as well as with merchants from his own country. Ordinarily, a young man so far away from home and in a strange city would cling to any friendly connections designed to ease his heavy responsibilities, but McDonogh showed surprising boldness and independence of thought. He not only refused to heed the advice of Taylor's commission agents in New Orleans, but he also chose others to help him with his business.<sup>11</sup> His willingness to strike out for himself, in the

<sup>6</sup> William Osborne Payne, another of Taylor's youthful clerks, was the one to whom a number of important letters for Taylor were sent. In a letter to Payne himself, Elisha Thatcher of Fredericksburg, Pennsylvania, asked that McDonogh be sent to purchase some articles for him. Elisha Thatcher to Payne, August 13, 1799, *ibid.*, XIII. A few days before Thatcher had inquired anxiously about Taylor's health. A note on the letter gave McDonogh permission to open it in the event that Payne was absent when it arrived. Thatcher to Payne, August 8, 1799, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 454. "When McDonogh entered the business world at the beginning of the nineteenth century the characteristic features of the Commercial Revolution were still much in evidence. Great fortunes came from trade rather than manufacturing. It was still a 'swapping' age, with the large traders sending their vessels to the ends of the earth in search of products that would yield a profit." *Ibid.*, 455-56.

<sup>8</sup> "In many respects New Orleans was a fortunate location for McDonogh or any other young merchant. The town more than doubled its population in the first ten years of his residence, and at the same time its commerce was making rapid strides." *Ibid.*, 456.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 458.

<sup>10</sup> McDonogh was still renting a store as late as November, 1804. In that month he paid the estate of John Turnbull \$204 for the rent of a store from June 1, 1803, to November 1, 1804. See rent receipt, C. Norwood to McDonogh, November 1, 1804, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>11</sup> Lanthois, Pitot and Company to William Taylor, September 28, 1800, Taylor Papers, XVI.



face of unsettled world conditions, in a business altogether too sensitive to changing international conditions,<sup>12</sup> gave proof of his strength of character.

He was not adverse to cooperating with other young men sent by Taylor to New Orleans and the partnerships he formed with two of them proved quite successful. The first of these fortunate combinations was with William Osborne Payne who had been a clerk with him in Taylor's Baltimore office in the late 1790's. Their partnership was formed some time in 1801 and was formally dissolved on August 27, 1802.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps ill health, the constant strain of trying to satisfy the complaints of the Taylor brothers, and a belief that better opportunities lay elsewhere induced Payne to go to New York.

On September 11, 1802, Payne arrived in New York,<sup>14</sup> from which city he notified William Taylor that he would be doing business for himself.<sup>15</sup> Payne formed a partnership with Robert Bennet Forbes of New York,<sup>16</sup> and the new firm handled some of McDonogh's sugar speculations.<sup>17</sup> Occasionally Payne warned McDonogh about William Taylor's dissatisfaction concerning affairs in New Orleans. In the spring of 1803 he wrote that "Mr. Taylor has been extremely dissatisfied lately, at not receiving Remittances . . . not more than 10,000\$ have been sent him, since I left New Orleans."<sup>18</sup> Payne's death on March 25, 1804,<sup>19</sup> removed one of McDonogh's earliest business associates from the scene.

Wars in Europe were Europe's tragedy and American merchants' gain, in spite of the interferences with neutral trade. Until the Peace of Amiens early in the spring of 1802 brought a

<sup>12</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 456. "The picture [for the merchant] was not wholly favorable, either in New Orleans or the world at large. International wars marked much of the period, and traders scarcely knew what to expect from one day to another. Blockades, captures at sea, closed ports, tariff changes, even outright confiscation of cargoes, made business extremely hazardous." *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 458, n. 19.

<sup>14</sup> William O. Payne to McDonogh, September 11, 1802, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>15</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, May 16, 1803, *ibid.* "W. O. Payne is at N York where he expects to settle, he will not return to New Orleans on my Business." *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 464.

<sup>17</sup> Some letters in the McDonogh Papers deal with McDonogh's shipments of sugar on his own account to Forbes and Payne and later Grant Forbes and Company of New York. Two letters, typical of the group, are Forbes and Payne to Shepherd Brown and Company, May 11, 1804; Grant Forbes and Company to Shepherd Brown and Company, July 20, 1804.

<sup>18</sup> Payne to McDonogh, May 9, 1803, *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> James Grant Forbes to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, March 30, 1804, *ibid.* Forbes wrote that Payne died "after indiscribable sufferings." *Ibid.*

sharp recession in trade, the situation seemed bright enough from Taylor's point of view to permit "a rapid expansion of McDonogh's activities . . . throughout the year 1801."<sup>20</sup> Expansion was the keynote at Natchez as well during that year, with Taylor shipping liquors and other luxury items to the Natchez region where his agent, Captain James T. Magruder, was optimistic about the prospects of profitable sales. It was not long before he had to admit defeat, returning to Baltimore after leaving most of the goods in the hands of a commission merchant at Natchez.<sup>21</sup>

John and William Taylor were making a desperate gamble against time and the ever-present possibility of a return of peace to Europe. It was their misfortune to spread their resources too thin and to tie up too much capital in the New Orleans venture. They were constantly in need of cash, constantly pleading for remittances, and alternately threatening and cajoling the harried young agents in New Orleans. The Taylor brothers were acutely aware of the blow that a European peace could deal their shaky finances.<sup>22</sup> On October 13, 1801, John Taylor wrote, mistakenly, that peace had been declared and that all products, particularly cotton and tobacco, were rapidly declining in price. He warned McDonogh against purchases of cotton except if the article could be delivered in England at two thirds of the market price there. He feared ruin for himself and his brother if McDonogh had already bought great amounts of cotton at higher prices.<sup>23</sup>

William Taylor's early correspondence with McDonogh and his partners was liberally sprinkled with complaints, tales of woe, and bitter denunciations of his New Orleans agents. He

<sup>20</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 458.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 460, 466. Even before Magruder had returned, William Taylor was complaining about the delay. See William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, February 14, 1803, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>22</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 461. "International peace would destroy the advantages which American commerce had enjoyed during the war of the Second Coalition, and the success of Napoleon's armies on the Continent indicated that hostilities might be terminated any time. During the closing months of 1801 McDonogh received mistaken reports of peace both from Baltimore and England. In these the Taylors and their agents revealed their appreciation of the bad effects which peace would have on mercantile operations, although they failed to get their business in better shape before the war actually ended the following spring.

"Cargoes of goods continued to arrive for McDonogh and Payne in the early months of 1802. On March 25, however, the Peace of Amiens brought a temporary halt in hostilities between France and England, and for the next eighteen months McDonogh went through perhaps the most trying time of his long business career. The favored position of American shipping was gone, Napoleon was free for the time being to push his plans to build an empire in the New World, and the Taylors expected immediate remittances of thousands of dollars worth of provisions from New Orleans." *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> John Taylor to McDonogh, October 13, 1801, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers. Mr. Wisdom, a prominent attorney of New Orleans, has more than one hundred McDonogh items. He generously consented to the photostating and use of a portion of his collection by the author. Documents from his collection will be properly identified whenever they are used.

never seemed to realize that his plight grew in part out of a basic unsoundness in his methods. Taylor "undoubtedly bought merchandise on too short a time to get return shipments before his bills became due."<sup>24</sup>

On November 23, 1801, Taylor wrote to Shepherd Brown that he "must have some funds here shortly or it will be of serious consequences."<sup>25</sup> One month later he declared, in a letter to Payne and McDonogh, that he "must have 100,000\$ here to clear me of [debt to] the world." There were many failures in Baltimore in the winter of 1801-1802 and Taylor's own situation looked so black that he feared he would be forced to sell his "Bank & Insurance Stock" unless remittances arrived.<sup>26</sup>

A new low in despair was sounded by Taylor a few months after the Peace of Amiens:

Your conduct in delaying money has distressed me beyond description. I am made the most unhappy & miserable of men and all my friends are forsaking me. They begin to form the opinion you will ruin me—That you are either speculating and trading with my money or that you are dissipated & careless of Business, and that I shall not have my property accounted for—The expectations of money from you is so old a Tale it is treated with ridicule and I have got into Contempt. surely both of you cannot be so totally changed . . . you were Industrious & men of Business—Good God what is the matter —For God sake let it be explained—It is said by some you are too young and I a madman to Trust so much Business and Property in your hands. I cannot think so yet . . . you must rain the Cash [remittances on me.]<sup>27</sup>

Trouble on the high seas added to Taylor's difficulties. One of his schooners, the *Young Montezuma*, was seized and taken to New

<sup>24</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 459.

<sup>25</sup> William Taylor to Shepherd Brown, November 23, 1801, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>26</sup> William Taylor to McDonogh and Payne, December 28, 1801, *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> William Taylor to McDonogh and Payne, August 14, 1802, *ibid.* In April of 1802 Taylor had \$234,000 worth of goods in New Orleans. See Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 461. A week before his plaintive outburst, Taylor lashed out at the partners for trying to ruin him: "There is no describing my distressed situation; which is entirely occasioned by your astonishing and strange neglect in remittances: nothing but my inability of late in leaving my affairs safe, has prevented my visiting you; and I shall be forced by my friends to see you shortly to look after my large property. It is now more than a year since your W.O.P. [William O. Payne] left me, and almost a year since your large Cargo's arrived, and I never got one account of sales yet, nor have I had any remittances that did me much good. On the four Cargo's you shipped me, there is a loss of 7559 89/100 Dollars, besides all freights. I did not expect such treatment from you;—it appears you are determined to ruin me:—if you do not fall on some means instantly to remit and satisfy me in this business, it must ruin me here; and I must either come, or empower some person to visit you and look into the business. For God sake be roused! and let me consider you in the same light, as I did before you went to New Orleans." William Taylor to McDonogh and Payne, August 7, 1802, McDonogh Papers.



Providence on the pretext that she carried Castile soap.<sup>28</sup> In November of the same year he reported that the *Dolphin* had been wrecked and that most of its cargo was lost. Neither the ship nor the cargo had been insured.<sup>29</sup> Another of his ships was wrecked on the Bahama Banks, but the craft was partly insured.<sup>30</sup> He lost the brig *Venilia* in 1803 and planned to buy another vessel to take its place.<sup>31</sup> Taylor on one occasion showed himself willing to take advantage of a ruse if it promised greater returns. On New Year's day, 1803, he wrote to McDonogh: "You are always at liberty to put any Vessels of mine under Spanish Colours when it can answer a good purpose."<sup>32</sup>

The uncertainties of mail service in the early nineteenth century must have seemed equally exasperating to a capitalist whose fortunes depended upon interchange of written messages. Taylor wanted a continuous flow of letters from McDonogh; instead, nerve-racking delays frequently kept him in ignorance of developments during a crisis. In the month of December, 1803, he made at least three specific complaints about the lack of news from McDonogh.<sup>33</sup> He felt hurt because others received letters when there was none for him. Sometimes Taylor expected letters at too frequent intervals, but at other times he was more than two months without word from New Orleans.<sup>34</sup> Considering the pressure of business and the critical nature of the times, McDonogh was not entirely remiss in his correspondence. In a period of eighteen months, Taylor received at least twenty-one letters from him.<sup>35</sup> Their contents did not always please him, however.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>28</sup> William Taylor to McDonogh, January 14, 1801, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>29</sup> William Taylor to Shepherd Brown, November 23, 1801, *ibid.* Apparently Taylor did not always have the funds to insure his ships. In 1803 he was anxious about the fate of the *Experiment*, which had not been insured. See William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, October 10, 1803, *ibid.* Even before this he had asked McDonogh to sell the *Experiment*. See William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, May 28, 1803, *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, January 1, 1803, *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, December 18, 1803; January 22, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, January 1, 1803, *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, December 4, 10, 18, 1803, *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, December 4, 1803; June 17, 1804; February 10, 1805, *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, January 1, October 10, 1803; January 8, 22, March 25, April 1, 8, 29, May 13, 27, 1804, *ibid.* At times verbal complaints were made to old John McDonogh, who wrote to his son: "Mr Taylor complains to me that you are doing nothing to his advantage and does not make him Remittance as Quick as you ought to do." McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, August 14, [1802?], *ibid.* In trading for Taylor, the father wrote at another time, "Endeavour If possible to strike the Iron Quicker while it is hot than you have done since yr. Arivall there but this you must know best." McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, February 16, 1802, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers.

<sup>36</sup> William Taylor to McDonogh and Payne, August 14, 1802, McDonogh Papers. "On looking over your late letters there is something so unmeaning, nugatory & Trifling That I cannot account for the Change—you dwell [at] great length on Trifles and things of no consequence and what is important to me is scarcely noticed—This has now continued too long and must be Instantly remedied by a great Change in yr' Correspondence." *Ibid.*

John Taylor tottered on the brink of bankruptcy in 1802 and as a result "was even more violent in his denunciation of the partners during the crisis. A letter of August 11 [1802] revealed his highly disturbed state of mind . . . . If his distress for money proved ruinous to his credit, 'Mr McDonogh, & myself, must not, & will not both live in the world, If I can find him upon the face of God almightys Earth.'"<sup>37</sup> Made reckless by his plight, John Taylor accused McDonogh of deliberately ruining his credit in a cold-blooded attempt to establish himself at Taylor's expense. He threatened that it would "not be an easy matter for" McDonogh "to obtain my forgiveness."<sup>38</sup>

A plan to sail from England in November, 1802, apparently had been abandoned by John Taylor because the return of peace had thrown his business affairs into a snarl that required his constant attention. His brother in Baltimore was making a valiant effort to aid him and seemed hopeful of success in January, 1803.<sup>39</sup> Within a month, however, he was forced to forward the disquieting news that his brother had asked his creditors for a suspension of his debt payments. Even as he relayed orders that a shipment of goods be made for John's account William cautioned McDonogh that John's creditors might try to seize his (William's) property in New Orleans. McDonogh was to repel all attempts of this nature, because the brothers had no partnership.<sup>40</sup>

McDonogh moved rapidly and efficiently in this crisis and by November, 1803, had a large cargo of fine quality cotton in Liverpool for the account of John Taylor. V. P. Ashfield and Son, the commission house to which the cotton had been sent, regretfully reported that the proceeds from the cargo had not been enough to meet the first installment on the notes due November 18, 1803. A few weeks before the notes fell due, John Taylor sailed for Baltimore.<sup>41</sup> From that city William wrote that his brother planned to sail to New Orleans. To reassure McDonogh, who had reason to fear a scene, William declared that his brother's purpose was "health entirely." A few days later, William

<sup>37</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 462. John Taylor's London firm had been founded around the year 1789. See William Taylor to McDonogh, January 14, 1801, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>38</sup> John Taylor to McDonogh and Payne, October 6, 1802, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>39</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, January 1, 9, 1803, *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, February 14, 1803, *ibid.* John Taylor actually suspended payments until November, 1803. See William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, May 28, 1803, *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> V. P. Ashfield and Son to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, November 13, 15, 21, 1803, *ibid.*

asked him to "Show my brother all the attention you can and furnish him what money he wants." Nonetheless, McDonogh was not to allow John to impede the flow of remittances to Baltimore.<sup>42</sup>

Anxiety for his brother's safe arrival at New Orleans was evident in William's letter of January 22, 1804.<sup>43</sup> In all probability John Taylor reached New Orleans between December 20, 1803, and January 5, 1804.<sup>44</sup> McDonogh's striking force of personality and lavish hospitality were nowhere more clearly evident than in the startling reversal of attitude undergone by John Taylor during and after his visit.<sup>45</sup> Nor is there any indication that he found McDonogh inefficient or dishonest.

John Taylor left New Orleans on February 4, 1804, and thirteen days later was in New Providence. From this port he expected to go to Baltimore and then return to England in May. On his journey to Maryland the traveler stopped in New York for several days.<sup>46</sup> He reached Baltimore on April 9, remained there more than a month, and then sailed for Liverpool, May 25, 1804. Ill health soon forced his return to the United States where he died while going to a health resort in Virginia.<sup>47</sup>

William Taylor's downfall proved more tragic than that of his brother, even though the event was delayed by a decade or more after John's death. Fortunately for William's peace of mind, he could not foresee his own failure. Until a breach in his business relations with McDonogh came in the period 1804-1806, he continued a brisk trade via his agents in Louisiana. The many letters that issued from his pen and the ship manifests and price lists that often accompanied them, give the reader a vivid picture of one phase of economics in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

<sup>42</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, December 4, 10, 18, 1803, *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, January 22, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 470. John Taylor's "long-threatened arrival at New Orleans occurred either late in 1803 or early in 1804, although his prospects had already greatly improved. His visit brought a compound of revelation and almost spiritual conversion." In spite of John Taylor's change of heart, McDonogh almost ceased business relations with him after his visit. *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> John Taylor to McDonogh, February 17, 1804, McDonogh Papers. "I am next to acknowledge with gratitude," he wrote, "your extreme politeness to me in every respect, for which, please accept my thanks—& may Heaven bless and prosper you always." "Let the past be forgotten entirely, that we may all, mutually enjoy, the benefits of the future." *Ibid.* William Taylor had become reconciled with McDonogh months before this. See William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, May 16, 1803. "I request yr' J McDonogh to remove all uneasiness from his mind at present with regard to my confidence in him and the approbation I shall give his conduct in my affairs—I find he has had a difficult part to act."

<sup>46</sup> John Taylor to McDonogh, February 17, 1804; William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, April 1, 8, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> John Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, April 29, 1804; William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, May 27, 1804; McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, July 2, 1805, *ibid.*



A running commentary on international events and the probable results of their impact on trade also enlivened the correspondence. These results sometimes created intolerable stresses, as did the withdrawal of the right of deposit at New Orleans on October 16, 1802, following Spain's retrocession of Louisiana to France.<sup>48</sup> Even after the United States had signed the Louisiana Purchase Treaty, there were rumors that Spain would not give up New Orleans. And in the fall of 1803 Taylor had grave fears that the French would close the mouth of the Mississippi, precipitate a war with the United States, and cause him to lose all of his New Orleans property. More than seven months before this he had urged McDonogh to sell out his goods in New Orleans. On October 21, 1803, he felt convinced that Congress would appropriate the money to consummate the purchase of Louisiana and that the United States would soon take over New Orleans.<sup>49</sup>

Renewal of the Napoleonic Wars, combined with the acquisition of Louisiana by the United States, revived Taylor's hopes. He planned to make a fortune by taking advantage of tariff changes that were certain to follow.<sup>50</sup> If he and McDonogh bought goods before duties were removed, and got them to each other immediately after these extra costs were abolished, they would make exceptional profits before the market readjusted itself to the prevailing rates. McDonogh was warned on December 4, 1803, that he should not ship large cargoes until the American duties on Louisiana exports were repealed. Six days later, Taylor reported that a bill to repeal the duties was now before the House.<sup>51</sup>

Sugar attracted Taylor's attention as the best article for speculative purposes both during and after the tariff changes. For more than two years he gambled heavily, even recklessly, on this commodity. Sugar of fine quality, he wrote early in 1803, was in demand in Baltimore.<sup>52</sup> By the fall of 1803, he frankly

<sup>48</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 463. "Already . . . on October 16, 1802, the Spanish Intendant at New Orleans had stopped the American right of deposit at that port, thus seriously affecting the export trade down the Mississippi River and the prosperity of American commission agents who handled the traffic . . . The period from March, 1802, to the summer of 1803 brought failures for many merchants and threats of disaster to all who operated in the New Orleans area." *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, October 21, February 14, 1803, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>50</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 469-70.

<sup>51</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, December 4, 10, 1803, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>52</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, February 14, 1803, *ibid.*

admitted that sugar and molasses were "a speculation," and asked McDonogh to ship to him all of these two commodities that he could obtain, even if he had to draw on Taylor for cash to buy the cargoes. Taylor complained that McDonogh never shipped molasses to him even though the product enjoyed a good market in Baltimore. As for sugar, the abolition of the duty of \$3.00 per hogshead would enable him to reap a splendid profit.<sup>53</sup>

Sugar prices remained at a high level throughout December, 1803, and Taylor quoted prices at \$13.00 or more per hogshead. "It appears to me," he pleaded with McDonogh, that "there is a most glorious opportunity now for you to make up to me all that I have suffered by my large advances to New Orleans."<sup>54</sup> This was to be an all-out drive to recoup his previous losses. McDonogh was to convert all of Taylor's New Orleans property into cash, invest the money in sugar and molasses, and hold the articles until a rise in prices occurred. Taylor generously offered to allow McDonogh a share in the speculation: "If you wish to take an interest in these purchases, I have no objection & you will name" your terms "to me."<sup>55</sup>

McDonogh's refusal to share in the enterprise did not lessen Taylor's ardor; before the end of January, 1804, he asked that his ship, the *Regis*, be loaded with 1,000 hogsheads of sugar and molasses. Less than three months later he was advising McDonogh to rush sugar to him by means of chartered vessels, instead of waiting for the arrival of his ships from Baltimore. None of this sugar purchased for his account was to be shipped to Philadelphia, New York, or Boston, because it did not sell well in those cities.<sup>56</sup>

A purchase totaling 1,250 hogsheads was made for Taylor early in 1804 through the efforts of McDonogh who then chartered a ship to rush 400 hogsheads to Baltimore. The need for haste was dictated in part by the competition of West Indian sugar, which generally began to reach the Baltimore market in June or July. If Louisiana sugar of high quality could arrive first, a sound profit could be made. There was a dearth of fine sugar

<sup>53</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, October 21, 1803, *ibid.* In this letter Taylor told McDonogh that the last cargo of sugar sent to him had been sold at \$12.00 to \$13.00 per hogshead, for an average profit of \$2.00 per unit. *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, December 4, 10, 18, 1803, *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, December 18, 1803, *ibid.* McDonogh wounded Taylor's feelings by his cool reception of the plan and Taylor wrote with some bitterness: "It surprises me a little to hear from you there is no sugar to be had and as Mr. [Rezin D.] Shepherd had not arrived I think it a little strange you pass over my contemplated scheme of purchases & contracts so lightly." William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, January 8, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, January 22, April 1, 1804, *ibid.*

in the Baltimore market in April, 1804, and Taylor eagerly awaited the *Bee's* cargo. Unfortunately, the sugar carried by the *Bee* tended to spoil and to melt,<sup>57</sup> just as did the earlier cargo of the *Comet*. McDonogh was told that "bad New Orleans sugar" would not sell.<sup>58</sup> His losses, Taylor complained, caused him severe suffering.<sup>59</sup>

Cotton was another major item in William Taylor's business, most of the shipments going to Liverpool, England, where the artificial stimulus of wartime demands kept the price of the staple at a high level. Even before the uneasy truce called the Peace of Amiens had evaporated, cotton was quoted at 18¢ to 20¢ per pound. The *Carlisle* was loaded with cotton earmarked for V. P. Ashfield and Son.<sup>60</sup> Part of an earlier shipment proved to be inferior cotton, leading the English agents to suggest mildly that a more strict attention to gin marks and to the cleanliness of the product would help. They also advised more accurate invoicing of weights.<sup>61</sup>

Fluctuations in the price of cotton were rapid in the latter part of 1803. In October it was described as dull at 18¢. By December the staple was in demand even at prices of 20¢ per pound. There was a short crop, but Taylor did not expect a rise in prices in Europe. McDonogh quoted the price at 15¢ in the spring of 1804,<sup>62</sup> indicating a steep decline.

The overshadowing importance of sugar, molasses, and cotton must not be allowed to obscure the extremely varied nature of the cargoes shipped between New Orleans and Baltimore. On many occasions Taylor shipped flour, together with other products, a typical cargo of this kind being the one sent out by him in December, 1803.<sup>63</sup> In addition to 350 barrels of flour, the *Comet*

<sup>57</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, March 25, April 29, May 13, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, April 8, 1804, *ibid.* A few hogsheads of fine quality sugar sold at \$14.00 whereas the bulk of the cargo, consisting of "bad" sugar, had to be sacrificed at \$8.00 or less per hogshead. *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, May 27, 1804, *ibid.* His offer to handle any shipments McDonogh might make on his own account could have been designed to give Taylor the opportunity to compare the quality of McDonogh's personal cargoes with his own. See William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, February 10, 1805, *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, February 14, 1803; April 1, 29, 1804, *ibid.* Five hundred bales were to be sent to William Lees of Liverpool. See William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, June 17, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> V. P. Ashfield and Son to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, December 7, 1803, *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, October 10, 21, December 4, 10, 1803; January 22, May 27, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, December 10, 1803, *ibid.* When war was resumed in Europe, Taylor believed that a profit could be made if flour could be shipped at no more than \$35 per barrel, all costs included. William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, March 1, 1803, *ibid.*



carried 50 barrels of potatoes, 30 barrels of wine, 25 kegs of lard, 92 boxes of tallow candles, 4 casks of cheese, 4 bales of blankets, and molasses casks.<sup>64</sup>

Lead, indigo, and logwood were regarded as articles suitable for remittances to Taylor, and often made up the cargoes sent out by McDonogh. On one shipment of indigo, Taylor made a satisfying profit in spite of heavy duties. In this trade McDonogh was never very long without price lists informing him of the state of various markets. For example, there was an excellent market in Baltimore for lead and logwood during the last quarter of 1803. Taylor even speculated in salt for a short time.<sup>65</sup>

Taylor's ships arrived in New Orleans from Baltimore or left the former for the latter port with steady regularity throughout 1803 and 1804.<sup>66</sup> There were times when the ships carried brothers or friends of McDonogh as passengers.<sup>67</sup> Occasionally McDonogh was asked to secure passengers for a return trip to Baltimore. Passenger fares in the winter of 1803 were set at \$100 for cabin accommodations and \$50 for steerage.<sup>68</sup>

No one man could handle the huge volume of business that passed through McDonogh's hands; consequently, almost as soon as William Payne had departed for New York, "McDonogh formed a business association with Shepherd Brown, an arrangement that lasted in various forms until the latter's death. Under the title of John McDonogh Jr., and Company the two continued the activities of the old firm of John McDonogh and Payne. In order to share in the provisions trade, created by large shipments from American territory up the river, they established the firm of Shepherd Brown and Company, and Brown devoted much of his effort in that direction. During the next few years he made trips in the back country and became well acquainted in the states and terri-

<sup>64</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, December 4, 10, 1803, *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, October 10, 21, December 4, 10, November 20, 1803, *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> The dates of a few letters mentioning the arrival or departure of Taylor ships are: William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, October 10, December 10, 18, 1803; January 8, March 25, April 1, 8, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Joseph McDonogh was a passenger on the *Comet* when the ship arrived in Baltimore harbor, March 28, 1804. See William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, April 1, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, December 10, 1803, *ibid.*

tories to the north."<sup>69</sup> Both firms were in operation near the end of September, 1802, rapidly acquiring a good name and securing a business from distant as well as neighboring areas.<sup>70</sup>

Throughout the remainder of 1803 and the year 1804 Taylor's ships landed a varied assortment of wares at New Orleans for McDonogh's disposal. Included were such items as iron, anchors, paints, hardware, molasses casks, hoops for hogsheads, brick, glassware, bagging, rope, candles, provisions, and dry goods. The return cargoes consisted principally of cotton, sugar, molasses, with flour, indigo, and logwood frequently included. In the summer of 1803 McDonogh, never prone to brag, wrote his father that he was building warehouses to care for the large business passing through his hands. Henry Molier and Company soon became his favorite auctioneers and disposed of dry goods and other items for him from time to time. With Taylor to supply the manufactured products of the outside world, and the firm of Shepherd Brown and Company to care for the agricultural products coming down the river, his warehouses must have presented a picture of great activity as the trade of the port expanded under the stimulus of prospective American occupation. McDonogh was now prepared to take his place as one of the leading commission merchants of New Orleans.<sup>71</sup>

Success brought with it a multiplicity of activities that must have absorbed nearly every waking hour of the partners. Sometimes they collected bills for others.<sup>72</sup> Frequently, where debts of any large amount were involved, the partners were given the power of attorney,<sup>73</sup> an authority they did not always use speedily

<sup>69</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 464-65. As early as the winter of 1801 Shepherd Brown was in the Natchez region, trying to buy cotton for Taylor. *Ibid.*, 459.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 465, n. 41. "The year 1803 had brought a great increase in the Mississippi River trade, shipments to the partners coming from Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. During the next few years the trade in that direction continued with increasing volume and Shepherd Brown and Company handled a varied assortment of produce—cotton, flour, deerskins, deerhorns, bacon, lard, whiskey, hemp, pork, beef, meal, onions, wheat, and lead." *Ibid.*, 470-71.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 468-69. In the late summer of 1803 McDonogh's father wrote: "I am viary much rejoiced in my mind to hear that you are building ware houses and are doing so well." McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, August 19, 1803, McDonogh Papers. There was a hint of envy in Taylor's remark that he had heard about McDonogh's and Shepherd Brown's "great command" of money. William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, January 8, 1804, McDonogh Papers. The firm was well known and had a good name even as early as the summer of 1803. "I have seen a young man a few days ago," wrote McDonogh's father, "that lives at Natchez, he sold his cargo of cotton to yr house he gives the whole house a great and capitall name." McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, August 19, 1803, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>72</sup> John Scott to Shepherd Brown, October 5, 1802; P. A. Vandorne to Shepherd Brown, April 27, 1803; John Aiekim [?] to Shepherd Brown and Company, April 12, 1804; William Hargrove to McDonogh and Brown, October 23, 1807, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>73</sup> John Shreve to Shepherd Brown and Company, December 16, 1806; Matthew Nimmo to Shepherd Brown and Company, August 9, 1803; legal document, power of attorney, William Steel to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, August 16, 1803, *ibid.*

enough for their clients.<sup>74</sup> A request for their services might concern a simple, unimportant purchase of smoking tobacco,<sup>75</sup> or the buying of a cargo for a client in Europe.<sup>76</sup>

The expansion of the trading activities of McDonogh and Brown ultimately involved them in a new trouble with William Taylor, and, although all parties to the arrangement were now profiting to a greater extent than ever before, a breach developed in the fall of 1804. The immediate occasion for the quarrel was Taylor's discovery that the New Orleans agents were shipping sugar to other eastern houses. They had consigned a quantity to Forbes and Payne in New York in May, and had attempted to purchase German goods through the same firm in June. As Taylor had been counting heavily on operations in sugar to restore the losses which he had suffered at an earlier period in the New Orleans trade, he considered himself entitled to handle all the sugar which passed through the hands of McDonogh and Brown.<sup>77</sup>

Perhaps the earliest hint of the approaching break between Taylor and McDonogh was the former's action in sending Rezin D. Shepherd to New Orleans, some time before February, 1803, to check on his affairs there. After a brief stay, Shepherd returned to Baltimore, made his report, and then sailed once more for New Orleans, to take up his residence there at the beginning of 1804. His first task was to aid McDonogh in disposing of Taylor's unsold cargoes.<sup>78</sup>

As early as October, 1803, William Taylor thought he had detected a cold ingratitude in McDonogh who seemed to have forgotten that his start was due to the money he had been able to draw from Taylor's firm. McDonogh had told him that he (Taylor) was in debt to the New Orleans concern on a recent shipment. "The unexpected expression that you were in advance for me on the sailing of the Carlisle was a[l]most a death stroke to my

<sup>74</sup> Samuel Smith to Shepherd Brown and Company, January 15, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Faverrell to Brown and McDonogh, December 10 [?], 1803, *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> John Stevens and William Colman to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, February 4, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 474-75. The temptation to expand and to do independent business was great, considering the prosperous times and the influx of merchants from the eastern United States. For a discussion of the influx of American businessmen into New Orleans, see *ibid.*, 471-72.

<sup>78</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, February 14, December 10, 18, 1803; January 8, 1804, *ibid.* John Palfrey, another of Taylor's agents, had come to New Orleans in the summer of 1803 and later set up a partnership with Rezin D. Shepherd. See Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 472.



feelings," he wrote.<sup>79</sup> Reverberations of the quarrel reached the ears of old John McDonogh who laboriously wrote: "I would wish to know If any thing has happened between you and Mr. Taylor, as he has sett up another House in New Orlains which gives me Reason to think that something is the matter, you ought never to forgeet the feavours bestowed on you by Mr. Taylor." McDonogh was urged to show grateful remembrance for past favors and to aid Taylor whom the father esteemed highly.<sup>80</sup>

There can be little doubt that McDonogh's sugar speculation was one of the chief reasons for the breach with his former employer. An excellent account of this activity, that rankled so deeply in Taylor's breast, was relayed to the Baltimore merchant by a series of letters from Rezin D. Shepherd.<sup>81</sup> On February 13, 1804, Shepherd announced his arrival in New Orleans after a stormy passage and expressed his pleasant surprise at finding that McDonogh had purchased one thousand hogsheads of sugar for Taylor. Many people were eager to enter the speculation but few men had McDonogh's means or credit. "[He]<sup>82</sup> will however be forced to draw on you shortly very largely, and the only thing that I am fearful of in this business, is that you will not be able to have vessels here in sufficient time to carry the sugars to you by the time his bills on you will become due."<sup>83</sup>

Within a few days Shepherd was more critical of McDonogh. "I find," he wrote with what might have been a touch of malice, "that McDonogh is so much bent upon speculation and making a fortune for himself that I am fearful that I shall have some dif[f]iculty in bringing him to this Business" of closing out sales. Shepherd urged Taylor to order the return of all goods that would not sell. He also felt that it would be best if Taylor could come to New Orleans to settle his affairs.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>79</sup> William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, October 10, 1803, McDonogh Papers. Still later Taylor declared: "It appears to me I have felt a warmer solicitude for your prosperity . . . than has been returned on your part towards me." William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, January 8, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, December 28, 1804; March 25, 1805. John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers. "Pray never forgeet the feavours bestowed on you and on yr. Brothers by Mr. Taylor he is a worthy man, and it will allways give me pleasure to hear of your good Deeds done to him I am at a loss for words to Express my good wishes for him." *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> These letters are part of the William Taylor Papers. Atherton did not have access to them and hence his discussion of the quarrel is not as full as it might be.

<sup>82</sup> The paper was cut out or torn where the word "He" would have been.

<sup>83</sup> Rezin D. Shepherd to William Taylor, February 13, 1804, Taylor Papers, XXIV.

<sup>84</sup> Rezin Shepherd to William Taylor, February 20, 1804, *ibid.* An interesting portion of this letter dealt with McDonogh's purchase of large tracts of West Florida lands from the Spanish government.

He belittled McDonogh's efforts in buying sugar for Taylor, saying that McDonogh had used a broker to inspect purchases. He warned Taylor that McDonogh was not as busy collecting debts as he was in drawing on Taylor for large sums. As for McDonogh's plan to allow Taylor a share in the purchase of a sugar plantation, it should not be accepted until all accounts in New Orleans were settled. The letter closed on a cautious note: "As I am upon very good terms with McDonogh & hope to Keep so, I have to request that you will take proper care of what letters I write you in this way."<sup>85</sup>

In March, 1804, Taylor was informed that the influx of business from the "western country" would keep McDonogh too busy to attend to Taylor's affairs, but that he was properly impressed with the necessity of attending to them as soon as possible. McDonogh had bought a cargo of fine sugar and was preparing to ship it to Baltimore.<sup>86</sup>

Any hope that Taylor might have of sharing in McDonogh's land speculations was illusory, Shepherd declared on April 8, 1804. "He has entirely too great a desire to make money to do you Justice—He is now about shipping 200 Hhds sugar to New York on his own account." Shepherd claimed that he had opposed this business but was powerless before his adversary. Since McDonogh had told him to keep secret his speculation in sugar, Taylor must not allow him to know who had spoken about it. After all, they could close out Taylor's accounts only with McDonogh's aid and success depended on keeping his friendship. "He has you in his Power and [in] my opinion is very Capable of taking the advantage."<sup>87</sup>

Although McDonogh had told Taylor differently, he was planning to ship 272 hogsheads of sugar to Forbes and Payne. Shepherd described the operation almost as if it had been a conspiracy, remarking that McDonogh was "very anxious that you should know nothing of this Business."<sup>88</sup> McDonogh did not cease his shipments to Taylor, but his drawing for funds amazed Shepherd who exclaimed: "McDonogh has drawn on you, in such an

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* Taylor followed Shepherd's advice about the sugar plantation. See William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, April 1, 1804, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>86</sup> Rezin Shepherd to William Taylor, March 13, 1804, Taylor Papers, XXV. Shepherd apparently was well versed in McDonogh's affairs for he also made a keen comment about McDonogh's having been nominated as a director of the Louisiana Bank. *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Rezin Shepherd to William Taylor, April 8, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Rezin Shepherd to William Taylor, April 23, 1804, *ibid.*

extraordinary manner, within this week past he has drawn on you for upwards of 20,000\$ and talks of drawing fer [sic] more, where he will end God only knows I am certain he will draw on you for fully as much as the cost of the sugars, the fact is he is speculating with your money, and it was not until this day when in conversation with him that I learnt his plans, he has purchased about 1,500 Hhds sugar 280 of which is shipped to New York and those are three of the very best crops."<sup>89</sup>

Shepherd bemoaned his inability to oppose McDonogh because of the latter's power over him and Taylor. "He is probably one of the most ungrateful men in the world, the only thing that is to be done is to get every thing out of his hands as soon as possible, and to do that properly a pretended Confidence & friendship must always be kept up." When purchasing sugar for Taylor, McDonogh had not bothered to inspect it himself, Shepherd added.<sup>90</sup> Shepherd Brown was scarcely to blame for these for activities in opposition to Taylor's interest; "it is all McDonoghs doings who leads him in any way he pleases."<sup>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Rezin Shepherd to William Taylor, May 12, 1804, *ibid.* Shepherd's accusations are substantiated to a large degree by letters from Forbes and Payne and Grant and Forbes of New York to McDonogh, discussing his sugar shipments.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* According to Shepherd, McDonogh was also planning to buy slaves in Charleston with the proceeds from part of his sugar. *Ibid.* This project, however, seemed to have been abandoned. See Rezin Shepherd to William Taylor, July 15, 1804, *ibid.*, XXVI.

<sup>91</sup> Rezin Shepherd to William Taylor, June 16, 1804, *ibid.*, XXV. In this letter, Shepherd gave what is probably the only financial accounting of McDonogh's activities, during these early years, that has come down to us. He gave McDonogh's expenses since his establishment in New Orleans as follows:

"House rent & all other Expences McD calculated to be 3,500 p[er] year for 3-year[s] is }	10,500
Purchase of three lots.....	3,500
Building warehouses .....	4,000
Late purchase of Land.....	6,000
173 Hhds sugar p Brig Moses Gill to N York } weighing 186,000 weight @ 7\$ }	13,000
98 Hogs do p Venus to do 90,000 do @ 7\$.....	6,300
100 Hogs in store intended to be shipped to Charleston } which was bought a great bargain 105,000 do @ 4½\$ }	4,700
85—ditto intended for do 84,000 do @ 7\$.....	5,800
456 Hhds .....	53,800
Amount Brought up .....	53,800
As to the vessil & fitting out for the voyage to } Charleston they calculate to cost from 6 to 8000 } say.....	7,000
This sum given W O Payne.....	10,000
	<hr/> \$70,800"

"You can Judge whither [sic] or no they are not dealing and carrying on their speculations with your moneys," he concluded. *Ibid.*



The letters of Rezin Shepherd are not a proof that McDonogh was deliberately dishonest in his financial dealings, but they do show that he was hiding his own affairs from Taylor, that he was an opportunist, and that he was after the main chance.<sup>92</sup> The revelation of McDonogh's true character and intentions must have made Taylor sick at heart. He increased his efforts to settle his affairs in New Orleans, but hesitated to make an open break. This initiative was taken by McDonogh and Brown in September, 1804, in an action that caught Taylor by surprise. He had gone too far to retreat, however, and suggested that all goods either be sold or returned to him. "Taylor's anger over the change . . . was evident from rather bitter letters that passed between him and McDonogh as late as October."<sup>93</sup>

In the fall of 1807, McDonogh's father reported prematurely that Taylor was bankrupt and warned his son to avoid becoming entangled in the unfortunate man's fall.<sup>94</sup> But Taylor showed surprising vitality in the face of adversity. The year 1809 found him still doing business and still trying to close out his accounts in New Orleans. "I have prevailed on Mr. [William Y.] Lewis to go to New Orleans to settle with you all my old concerns & accounts," he wrote.<sup>95</sup> These accounts were still being settled the next year at which time McDonogh calculated the amount due to Taylor. This sum fell "far short" of the latter's expectations. Taylor soon asked McDonogh for a loan which apparently was not granted.<sup>96</sup>

Among Taylor's friends McDonogh was one of the few who continued to express concern for his welfare as his defeat in the battle to keep his head above the financial waters seemed certain. There was something pathetic and melancholy in the way the old man turned to one who had been a mere clerk in his once widespread concern. "Some times I think I shall try your attachment"

<sup>92</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 464, remarked that "McDonogh was scrupulously honest, but his undoubted ability in finding opportunities for profitable investments caused him to keep capital and credit which passed through his hands the full time he was legally entitled to its use." In a footnote on the same page, Atherton stated with gentle irony that "the business associates of McDonogh seem frequently to have called upon God to witness their inability to recover their capital rapidly." *Ibid.*, n. 40.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 476-77.

<sup>94</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, September 14, 1807, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers. "I Just mention to you that Mr. Wm. Taylor is Broke up and has given up all his property and for so large an amount that it is said he will not pay one shilling in the pound If you are in any Danjer of Loosing any thing by him pray try to secur yourself in New Orleans, If you can." *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> William Taylor to McDonogh, December 20, 1809, McDonogh Papers. Taylor also pleaded: "I hope you will enter on this Business immediately on the most amicable terms, and I entreat you to make as generous a settlement as you can." *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> William Taylor to McDonogh, March 13, 24, August 31, 1810, *ibid.*

for me, he told McDonogh in 1815, "for I am heartily tired of my degraded & humiliating situation here; and cou'd I leave the place with credit & honor I wou'd not hesitate."<sup>97</sup>

In answer to one of McDonogh's letters, Taylor spoke of his reputed "great wealth" and expressed the wish that the "Ease, Independence & contentment, so fondly contemplated" by McDonogh had been "nearly attained." Less than a year later Taylor confessed that his fight was lost and sadly offered a few books and pictures to his correspondent in New Orleans, as a remembrance of the "establishment of an early friend." The date of his departure for New Orleans was not fixed and yet he contemplated with "anxious Solicitude" a reunion with McDonogh.<sup>98</sup>

Humiliation of the bankrupt was fully experienced by Taylor in the latter half of 1817. He had made a formal application to the Commissioners of Bankruptcy on June 18, 1817, and on August 9 "appeared before them to meet" those who had claims against him. "There was not one there, nor a single interrogatory filed." He had to face the Court on September 20, 1817, to receive his "final discharge under the Bankrupt Law."<sup>99</sup> In his darkest hour, penniless and without influence, he planned to go to McDonogh. "Alas! you will find me strip'd of property, influence & Friends—and advanced in years, you have known me in better times and may think I deserved a better fate—You will not now find me less intrinsically worthy."<sup>100</sup>

November 20, 1817, saw the completion of Taylor's preparations to sail to New Orleans. The vessel on which he had taken passage was the *Missouri* which was due to sail near the end of the month—a date that was about two weeks earlier than the actual sailing time. On January 1, 1818, he wrote to McDonogh that he had reached the Mississippi after a trip of eighteen days and that the ship had been stalled fifty miles below New Orleans

<sup>97</sup> William Taylor to McDonogh, March 28, 1815, *ibid.* Taylor was thinking, even at his advanced age, of starting afresh in New Orleans. "If I can I will certainly see New Orleans this summer and if I can see any favourable opening for an establishment there perhaps I may not return" to Baltimore. *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> William Taylor to McDonogh, July 25, 1816; March 28, 1817, *ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> William Taylor to McDonogh, August 26, 1817, *ibid.* "Your sentiments are kind and liberal, and happily expressed . . . your sympathetic feelings for my misfortunes deserves my warmest gratitude," he assured McDonogh who had written to express his sorrow over the turn of affairs for his one-time employer. *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> William Taylor to McDonogh, May 15, 1817, *ibid.* McDonogh's good wishes seemed to bolster his failing courage. "I have received with great pleasure your letter of the 28th, March, and be assured the continuance of your expressions of friendship & attachment are highly pleasing . . . The clouds of Adversity have long hovered over me, the pursuit has closed, and I am compel'd to resort to the Bankrupt Law for relief." *Ibid.*

because of lack of wind.<sup>101</sup> The McDonogh Papers appropriately drop a curtain of silence over the broken man as he faced a new life in a strange land. Nothing more is heard of him until 1829, when Rezin Shepherd and McDonogh exchanged letters containing news of his death.<sup>102</sup>

Shepherd Brown and McDonogh proved far more fortunate in business. They had utilized every means available, had cleverly adopted Spanish citizenship,<sup>103</sup> had ingratiated themselves with the officials who governed Louisiana before the United States took possession, and had seized with unerring instinct every opportunity to make money. Then, at the height of their mercantile success, they "retired" from trade.<sup>104</sup> This retirement was not completed by 1806 for "even as late as 1813" McDonogh "received occasional requests from eastern merchants asking him to handle business for them."<sup>105</sup>

Many factors influenced McDonogh in his decision to change. For one thing, he and Brown had acquired large landed property and had become absorbed in land speculation, plantations, and real estate management.<sup>106</sup> Secondly, McDonogh had been influenced by his father's partiality for land speculation. McDonogh's awareness of the uncertain and transitory nature of mercantile prosperity was an important factor in his decision. "On the basis of his experience as a trader, it is easy to understand why Mc-

<sup>101</sup> William Taylor to McDonogh, November 20, 1817; January 1, 1818, *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> "I hear indirectly," Shepherd said, "that your old friend, Mr. Taylor is dead. How strange it is that events have never been mention[ed] to me by my brother or any other person when writing me. The poor old man outlived his time." Rezin Shepherd to McDonogh, April 20, 1829, *ibid.* McDonogh replied: "Our old friend, Mr. Taylor, has left us as you observe; he is happy in the bosom of his God, I hope and trust. He had been very frail long before his death, and died full of years. I always felt the greatest regard, affection and attachment for him, and gave him proof of it on every occasion by my conduct and behavior." McDonogh to Rezin Shepherd, August 4, 1829, quoted in Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 36. In 1845 a niece of Taylor recalled his tragic history in a letter asking McDonogh's aid for her consumptive brother. Jeanette Taylor Warner to McDonogh, December 9, 1845, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>103</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, January 1, 1804, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers. "You I suppose must be Naturelised, and made an Ameracan citizeen again." *Ibid.* According to Stanley C. Arthur, *The Story of the West Florida Rebellion* (St. Francisville, La., 1935), 42, Shepherd Brown was an alcalde for the Spanish government in the St. Helena District. Brown was opposed to any idea of a revolt from Spanish rule. He had "settled in the West Florida section soon after John McDonough [*sic*] arrived in Louisiana to begin his work of amassing a fortune in the New Orleans trade and in cypress swamps along the Iberville, Amite and Comite rivers. In this latter endeavor McDonough was ably assisted by his confidential agent in West Florida, Shepherd Brown. It was Brown who greased Spanish palms to secure these 'worthless' lands."

<sup>104</sup> In 1804, McDonogh's peak year as a merchant, his father heard that he had retired from business. "Pray give me some Reason for yr. Quitting Business at so Earley a date, I think that If you have even been so veary prosperous as I have heard, that you should have continued in the same Buisness 4 or 5 years longer." McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, December 28, 1804, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers.

<sup>105</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 477. Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 20, seemed to be of the opinion that the retirement was complete in 1806.

<sup>106</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 479; Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 20.



Donogh preferred the change to real estate."<sup>107</sup> Taylor's bankruptcy in 1817 and McDonogh's phenomenal success as a land speculator amply vindicated, in future years, a change that might have seemed rash at the time it had been made.<sup>108</sup>

It might have been better for McDonogh's future fame had he retired fully from all branches of trade, yet the records show that he continued to trade—in Negro slaves. One need not argue for or against the moral nature of traffic in human beings; nevertheless, participation in slave trade has not enjoyed general social approbation from that day to this. A eulogy on McDonogh would tend to ignore or hurry by this phase of his activities. A history must be more impartial, however. And slave trading was one of the many facets in the brilliant economic career of McDonogh.

McDonogh was still an apprentice to William Taylor when he began mercantile operations in New Orleans, but within four years his shrewdness and genius for business enabled him to gather a modest fortune. The apprenticeship contract that bound him to Taylor came to an end in December, 1800, after which he continued to act as agent for Taylor's firm. The first of his partnerships was with William O. Payne and lasted one year. Shepherd Brown formed a double partnership with McDonogh: one firm, Shepherd Brown and Company, handled produce from the interior; another, John McDonogh Jr. and Company, took care of imports. Both firms were highly successful in spite of wartime interference with neutral trade and the uncertainties of communications.

McDonogh had almost no money of his own. How did he secure the cash or credit by which he speculated for himself and became wealthy? The letters of Rezin Shepherd to Taylor supply the answer. They prove that McDonogh was making drafts on Taylor's firm for as much as \$20,000 at a time and speculating in sugar. With this borrowed capital he purchased sugar of the best quality and shipped it to New York and Philadelphia for his own account. He kept these operations secret from Taylor who was laboring under the impression that McDonogh's firm was dealing exclusively with him.

<sup>107</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 479-80.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 480.

When he learned the truth he protested bitterly, to no avail. And he was helpless to do much about it. He had more than \$200,000 worth of goods tied up in McDonogh's hands; to save as much of his property as possible, he needed McDonogh's co-operation. Besides, he was in desperate need of money. His pleas to McDonogh for cash remittances were not satisfied. McDonogh, now possessor of a fortune, retired from commercial enterprise into the fields of planting and land speculation. Taylor could not extricate himself so conveniently and suffered bankruptcy.

It is clear that McDonogh's relations with Taylor from 1800 to 1810 were marked by a cold opportunism. McDonogh used Taylor as a steppingstone to success and in making a final settlement with the ruined man he was far from generous. He did not violate the letter of his agreement with Taylor, yet on the other hand he certainly violated its spirit by hiding from Taylor the nature and scope of his private speculations, by straining Taylor's credit to the breaking point with heavy drafts on the firm, and by keeping the best sugar for himself.

In McDonogh's defense two things should be pointed out. Firstly, Taylor invited his own collapse by reckless and unwise speculations. Secondly, McDonogh displayed compassion for the bankrupt man and was one of the few friends who did not forsake him entirely. Taylor was invited to come and live with McDonogh, to try once more to re-establish himself in New Orleans. Whatever sins McDonogh had committed against him were forgiven and Taylor accepted with gratitude this act of charity.

Like many of the so-called "Robber Barons" of the last half of the nineteenth century, McDonogh had a desire to accumulate money—a desire that was almost psychopathic in its intensity and given a peculiar sort of idealistic tone by his devoutly religious nature. His slave trading and his untiring quest for wealth seem to prove what many students of McDonogh's life and work have suspected: namely, that he was decidedly an opportunist with his eye ever fixed on the main chance. The scope and variety of his activities stamp him as one of the earliest of modern American capitalists.

Although McDonogh must have made moderately large sums from slave trading, he demonstrated a marked reluctance to discuss his activities in this business. Not one letter can be found in which he spoke frankly of his speculation in Negro laborers.

Rather, there was ample reason to cast a veil of silence over this phase of his life, after he had become well known as a humanitarian and advocate of African colonization. Pangs of conscience might have caused him to look with distaste on his early role as a trader in Negroes. On several occasions, in the last decade of his life, he protested to correspondents that he would buy slaves but would never sell them. His manumission of slaves and his championship of African colonization might well have been undertaken in part to make amends for his supposed sins in helping to perpetuate the institution of slavery.

Banking connections were only a means to an end as far as McDonogh was concerned. Once within the banking circle, he could obtain larger amounts of credit with less effort, could make business acquaintances that would open up new investment opportunities to him, keep his finger on the economic pulse of the region, and acquire priceless foreknowledge of public contracts, bond issues, mortgages, and impending financial collapse of those firms and individuals with whom he might make splendid bargains by capitalizing on their misfortunes. Only the fervid muckracker would find something morally reprehensible in McDonogh's financial dealings. Many people, even today, would be inclined to say that he was smarter than most of his fellows and did to them only what they would have done to him had they had the advantage.

Too many writers label McDonogh as a miser, thereby doing a grave injustice to the man and ignoring reams of evidence to the contrary. It is true that he devoted his life to amassing wealth and it is also true that most of his contemporaries regarded him as a miser, but neither his quest for riches nor the public's hatred for him can be accepted as proof. Unlike a miser McDonogh did not love money for itself nor did he regard wealth as the end and object of his life. No one would call Andrew Carnegie a miser and yet McDonogh came as close to being his spiritual twin as any American who ever lived. Both men regarded money as a means to an end and this objective was a great work of charity through the agency of which they hoped to immortalize their names.

The explanation that clarifies McDonogh's position in regard to the society in which he lived is essentially a religious one. One must never forget that McDonogh was deeply imbued with the



Calvinistic conceptions of God, the gospel of work, and the brotherhood of the elect. McDonogh's God was the awe-inspiring Jehovah of the Old Testament—a divinity whose will was supreme and who had foreordained all things yet to come. Without implicit faith and trust in God, no amount of good works could bring salvation. To certain of his more capable creatures, God had given the great responsibility of being his stewards for the sublime task of gathering the riches of this world in trust for the improvident and incapable mass of mankind.

If suffering and distress to many poor people should accompany the concentration of wealth in few hands, the fault lay not with God's stewards who were mere humble instruments in His hands. Men should not question the inscrutable ways of God but should accept good or evil fortune, sickness or health, with patient humility. Rich men sometimes had heavy crosses to bear and might conceivably envy the carefree lives of the "virtuous poor." The wealth that the rich man seemed to be unjustly appropriating for himself was merely being held by him for the benefit of the children of the poor.

Fortified by ideas such as these, McDonogh could exploit men and resources with a conscience much clearer than would otherwise have been the case. Thus it was that all of his business dealings fitted into the pattern of his philanthropic schemes. Each speculation, every dollar of profit made, brought him one step nearer the goal set for him by his Creator. With the zeal of the crusader of old, he worked out his stewardship and when he decided to devote most of his attention to land speculation, the thoroughness of his application left nothing to be desired.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LAND COLOSSUS

New Orleans was destined to have a brilliant future marked by expansion seldom paralleled in American history. McDonogh's belief in this latent greatness was as profound as that of Thomas Jefferson who prophesied that the port one day would be one of the world's greatest emporiums.<sup>1</sup> And it was this faith which

<sup>1</sup> Many writers have been aware of McDonogh's unshaken faith in the future progress of New Orleans and Louisiana. The close tie between this faith and his high regard for real estate is clearly revealed by William Allan: McDonogh's "faith in the great growth and development of the South, and especially of Louisiana, was strong and unwavering, and he looked forward to the time when real estate of every kind would possess a greatly enhanced value." Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 31.

made it possible for McDonogh to become a foremost real estate speculator with landed possessions that dwarfed the holdings of men like Valcour Aime, Julien Poydras, and Bernard Marigny. Few if any in the ante-bellum South could boast success approaching McDonogh's in buying and selling land.

Those legends dealing with McDonogh's landholdings present him as a colossus towering above his contemporaries. The writers who assert that McDonogh possessed "the most extensive landed property owned by a single individual in the world" are indulging in gross exaggeration, typical of the stories circulated at the time of his death. The New Orleans *Daily Delta* told its readers: "he was said to own fifty miles fronting on the Mississippi, in Louisiana. Four-fifths of the swamp land in the State belonged to him. He had, too, immense possessions in Florida, Mississippi, and Texas."<sup>2</sup> In reality, McDonogh's holdings were not so vast as has been imagined. There have been larger holdings in Texas and in other areas of Spanish America.

Two principal objectives were in McDonogh's mind during all of his years of land dealing. In the first place, he sought to monopolize those swamp and marginal lands which would become valuable after nature, and the improvements of man, together with the exploitation of the choicest tracts, had opened for them a lucrative market among persons seeking agricultural and industrial sites. Secondly, he hoped to pull that coup so dear to the hearts of real estate men—to gain possession of those lands into which a prosperous, growing city must expand. His success in both objectives was a tribute to his foresight, management, and genius.

Many factors conspired to aid him. Louisiana was young, a great expanse of its surface was swampy, and most of the planters gave little thought to any but the fertile lands along the Mississippi and the bayous. Many of those primarily interested in real estate as a speculative venture focused their attention on city lots or plantations. Population had not become dense enough to press on the marginal lands. As a result, when he began his speculations, McDonogh found the competition for the unimproved lands relatively unimportant. It might well have been

<sup>2</sup> *Spirit of the Times*, XX (November, 1850), 464-65, quoted from the New Orleans *Daily Delta*, October 27, 1850. Other interesting comments on the landholdings of McDonogh are to be found in "McDonogh School Fund," *Louisiana Journal of Education* (Baton Rouge), III (December, 1881), 241; Mack B. Swearingen, "The John McDonogh Papers," *Southwest Review* (Dallas), XIX (April, 1934), 348; Childs, *John McDonogh*, 9.

true that even his best friends snickered when he invested money in "worthless" cypress swamps or in the poorly drained lands in back of plantations. Thus he was able to acquire vast tracts for a trifle, before his rivals realized their own folly.

Only too late did the scoffers understand why McDonogh had "a mania for buying" unimproved acres. As a pioneer in this type of land purchase on a large scale, McDonogh had an advantage too great to overcome. Although the statistics are fragmentary, it seems certain that McDonogh owned most of the swamplands and a fair percentage of the unimproved tracts that were privately held in 1850.<sup>3</sup> McDonogh was a close student of the nature of floods and of the Mississippi River. The waters of the continent's chief artery were loaded with fertile silt with which the river clogged up its outlets, built up the batture, and raised the level of those swamps subjected to its floods.

Periodic overflows each left layers of earth in the gloomy swamps of the state. Given enough time and a helping hand in the form of drainage by man, these swamps literally would rise out of their stagnant waters to become the richest lands in the Union. The process would be accelerated as the floods grew more severe and as the burden of silt carried by the river from eroded lands to the northward grew heavier. And when the land-hungry planters could find nothing else, they would be glad to clear and drain these water-logged tracts and protect them from inundation by a system of levees. The prospect was quite pleasing—all McDonogh had to do was buy those lands and then sit back patiently while nature and man worked to improve them for him.

The lands around New Orleans were either swamps or plantations already in the process of being turned into residential subdivisions in the early 1800's. Prices were still reasonable and one could afford to wait for those aristocratic Creole landowners to sell out after they had fallen victim to their own largesse and extravagance. They might despise the money-loving Yankee for

<sup>3</sup> "McDonogh School Fund," *Louisiana Journal of Education*, III (December, 1881), 241. Vincent Nolte, an enterprising German who did not find much success in merchandising in New Orleans, blended others' comments on McDonogh with his own prejudiced opinions. He remarked, in the vein of an article that appeared in the *New Orleans Daily Delta*, October 27, 1850, that McDonogh "owned four-fifths of all the uncultivated lands in . . . Louisiana." Nolte, *Fifty Years in Both Hemispheres* (New York, 1854), 87. The author of the article "John McDonogh," *Louisiana Journal of Education*, II (May, 1880), 76, declared that McDonogh was alleged "to have owned two-thirds of the swamp lands in Louisiana." This same statement can be found in the *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, December 29, 1898, and in Maude R. Fulson, "Some Studies in the Life of John McDonogh" (M. A. thesis, Tulane University, 1930), 60.



his designs on their wealth,<sup>4</sup> but they were for the most part as careless in business as was the spendthrift Bernard Marigny, whose patrimony below Canal Street was broken up and sold in the course of time.

Alexander Walker, author of a highly sentimental account of McDonogh, developed the thesis that McDonogh deliberately set out to encircle the city with his lands. Year after year he pursued his goal, silently buying a tract here and another there, until little by little the line of his properties made a circle about New Orleans. At last he had achieved his goal and in a rare state of exultation boasted to an acquaintance: "'Congratulate me, my friend; I have achieved the greatest victory of my life. I have drawn my lines around the city, and now entirely embrace it in my arms—all for the glory of God and the good of my race.'"<sup>5</sup> This story is undoubtedly fictitious, but it has this element of truth: McDonogh did seek to buy tracts in the probable direction of the city's growth.

From his father McDonogh acquired both the desire for acquisition of real estate and the idea of land speculation. The letters of the devout old Scot to his favorite son were models of paternalistic feeling—the father always tried to direct his sons in every aspect of life. In one of his numerous letters, he discussed the desirability of his son's investing some of that wealth, being made in New Orleans trade, in land. "Make some purchases of . . . good tracts of land," he told McDonogh, "It may lay dead many years but I am ceartain that the lands . . . will be growing better . . . and that great speculations have been made and will be made in that way."<sup>6</sup>

The son lost no time in acting on his father's advice. Together with Shepherd Brown, he plunged into a daring land speculation in West Florida,<sup>7</sup> and in doing so he took a step that led to almost

<sup>4</sup> There is a transcription of a planter's diary in the rare book room of the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library of Tulane University. Among its penetrating observations on social life and politics can be found a clever discussion of the hatred of the Creole, "Mr. Crapeau," for the Yankee, "Mr. Samuel Slick." The victory in the economic conflict obviously belonged to the latter. See Writers' Project, "Transcription of the Diary of a Louisiana Planter" (New Orleans, n. d.), 17.

<sup>5</sup> Walker, "John McDonogh the Millionaire," *Continental Monthly* (New York), II (August, 1862), 172. See also Childs, *John McDonogh*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, May 8, 1803, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>7</sup> Childs, *John McDonogh*, 8. The first reference to McDonogh's speculation in West Florida lands is found in a letter of Shepherd to William Taylor. "McDonogh has lately made a large purchase of land from the Spanish Government for which I expect they will at least pay her 8000\$." Shepherd to Taylor, February 20, 1804, William Taylor Papers, XXIV. Taylor wanted to share in the speculation but McDonogh seemed cool to the idea. "I notice your answer to my request for an interest in your late purchase of land and am sorry you have not those liberal sentiments towards me that I shou'd have had towards you," Taylor wrote reproachfully. Taylor to McDonogh, May 13, 1804, McDonogh Papers.

a century of litigation over land titles in the region. From Geronimo Lachiapella the partners purchased a half interest in 120,000 arpents of West Florida lands. All three men then united their interests for a sale to William Donaldson on December 11, 1805. Early in January of the next year, Donaldson resold the entire tract to Brown and McDonogh.<sup>8</sup> More than 100,000 arpents of this tract were located in St. Helena Parish, along the Tickfaw and Amite rivers and bordering Lake Maurepas.

Old John McDonogh was glad to hear that his son had made a purchase in West Florida, but he was concerned about rumors that the region would be disputed between Spain and the United States. His letter of December, 1804, explained the issue at stake. If the American contention that West Florida was a part of the United States was upheld, then McDonogh's titles were invalid. If Spain won the argument, or if there was a compromise, the titles would be honored. At any rate, McDonogh and Brown had paid so little for the land that an adverse decision would not hurt them seriously.<sup>9</sup>

In reply to his father, McDonogh said that he had acted on paternal advice. This pleased McDonogh Senior, as the son knew that it would do. Writing to his son on March 25, 1805, the father declared: "you Say the principal Reason for your making a purchase of Land in yr. Countree was on account of my writeing to you on that head, and as you Say that you allways Succeeded in following my Directions, therefore I hope you will in time find your purchase of this land much to your Advantage, but at present I onely wish to know how your title Stands affected on account of the change of Goverments."<sup>10</sup>

Rezin Shepherd was aware of the dangers in the speculation as early as the spring of 1804. He warned William Taylor, eager

<sup>8</sup> Petition by McDonogh to the District Court of Washington Parish, February 26, 1829, McDonogh Papers. Lachiapella secured the grant from the Spanish government on March 28, 1804, and sold a half interest to the partners on May 17, 1804. Brown's heirs sold their rights to McDonogh in the 1820's. On March 6, 1806, Lewis and Alexander Declouet sold almost 90,000 arpents of West Florida lands to McDonogh. *Ibid.* The letters of Shepherd to William Taylor make chronology of McDonogh's first West Florida purchases uncertain. Shepherd referred to large purchases made by McDonogh as early as February, 1804. Perhaps these lands were distinct from the Lachiapella grant or else Lachiapella was actually a secret agent for McDonogh.

<sup>9</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, August 26, December 12, 1804, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers. Litigation added to the cost of the land. In 1812 McDonogh estimated that the land had cost him 60 to 75 cents per acre, or an investment of more than \$72,000. McDonogh to Senator G. A. Magruder, September, 1812, quoted in Childs, *John McDonogh*, 154.

<sup>10</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, March 25, 1805, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers.

for a share in the enterprise, that the titles might be questioned and that if they were sound, McDonogh would not allow him to enjoy any of his good fortune.<sup>11</sup> The partners meanwhile were contemplating the importation of seaboard Negroes "to put on some of the land . . . lately purchased in west Florida." According to Shepherd, the initial cost of the West Florida land purchased by McDonogh and Brown was about \$6,000.<sup>12</sup>

McDonogh knew that American settlers would swarm into West Florida, forcing land values to highly speculative levels. If he and a fortunate few in possession of liberal Spanish grants could win confirmation of their titles from the United States, thousands of settlers would have to lease their acres, buy small plots at high prices, or face eviction in favor of rich planters. At first McDonogh had high hopes that the titles would be confirmed, but his speculation foundered on the rock of manifest destiny and popular antipathy. Jefferson and Madison, notwithstanding the weakness of their case in international law, seemed determined to regard West Florida as part of the Louisiana Purchase. Congress did not check their ambitions because this expansive policy was favored by poor but vociferous settlers.<sup>13</sup>

Because of his own large stake in West Florida, where his holdings totaled over 200,000 acres, and because of his knowledge of French and Spanish, McDonogh was made their unofficial spokesman by Creole and American claimants in the long fight against the federal government. In time he became thoroughly informed on all aspects of the intricate question; "he made a most meticulous study of treaties, maps, and histories of the day and often expounded upon the legality of his contentions."<sup>14</sup> At times he must have irked his congressmen by lecturing to them on

<sup>11</sup> Shepherd wrote: "if the Titles are good it certainly is a great speculation, our Government considers it as a part of Louisiana, and if they claim it & hold it as such, the Titles are not worth one cent, as the Spanish Intendant sold it since the Cession, The purchasers of this land are of the opinion that Louisiana extends no further to the East side of the Mississippi [*sic*] than the Island [*sic*] of New Orleans, should this be the case, in all probability they will hold their lands, numbers of them however are anxious to sell, and at not much more than the original cost, Mc Donogh [*sic*] has little doubt but that the Titles are good, and as long as he is of that opinion I am certain he would not allow you to share." Shepherd to Taylor, April 8, 1804, William Taylor Papers, XXV.

<sup>12</sup> Shepherd to Taylor, May 12, June 16, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> McDonogh saw why his cause was unpopular. "Our cause is the cause of the few," he told James Innerarity of Mobile, "consequently the unpopular one." McDonogh to Innerarity, August 17, 1817, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>14</sup> Florence Kane, "John McDonogh: Land Speculator" (M. A. thesis, Tulane University, 1943), 44. On pages 40-59 of her thesis, Miss Kane gives a reliable and detailed account of McDonogh's long fight to secure confirmation of his West Florida land titles. However, she seemingly was unaware of the large mass of papers, relating to McDonogh's land claims, deposited in the Private Land Claims Division of the National Archives.



the finer points of international law. Circumstances forced him to appear in the role of an enemy of the common settler and a defender of the unpopular Spaniard in the latter's argument with the United States.

The case of the United States hinged chiefly on an interpretation of Article 3 of the treaty of San Ildefonso, by which Spain promised "to retrocede to the French Republic . . . the colony . . . of Louisiana, with the same extent that it now has in the hands of Spain and that it had when France possessed it."<sup>15</sup> The article was a vital one for in the Louisiana purchase treaty of April 30, 1803, the boundary line between Florida and Louisiana had not been clarified. There was only the vague statement that France ceded Louisiana to the United States, with the same limits it had possessed when France acquired it under the treaty of San Ildefonso.<sup>16</sup>

The area in dispute was that region between the Mississippi and Perdido rivers, south of the thirty-first parallel, excluding the Isle of Orleans. "From 1695 to 1763 France occupied it as a part of Louisiana. Great Britain held it, with an enlarged Florida boundary, from 1763 . . . until the Definitive Treaty of Peace of 1783 provided for its return to Spain."<sup>17</sup> The United States argued that West Florida up to the Perdido was, and always had been, a part of Louisiana. Spain admitted that the region had been regarded by France as a part of Louisiana prior to 1763, but that the cession of the region to Britain in that year and the British incorporation of the area into the Florida administrative system removed it from Louisiana proper. Furthermore, when Britain retroceded Florida to Spain in 1783, West Florida was included.<sup>18</sup> The United States had given tacit recognition of this fact when it had tried to get Napoleon to have Spain include West Florida in the Louisiana Purchase. Therefore, Spain reasoned, the retrocession of Louisiana to Napoleon did not include West Florida; consequently Napoleon could not have sold what did not belong

<sup>15</sup> David Hunter Miller (ed.), *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, 8 vols. (Washington, 1931- ), II, 509. The treaty was signed on October 1, 1800.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 500.

<sup>17</sup> James Truslow Adams and R. V. Coleman (eds.), *Dictionary of American History*, 6 vols. (New York, 1940), V, 436. The most authoritative account of the West Florida controversy, through the year 1813, is Isaac Joslin Cox, *The West Florida Controversy, 1798-1813* (Baltimore, 1918). In 1804 Jefferson and his cabinet "decided that the right to West Florida was a *sine qua non*." See Thomas M. Marshall, *A History of the Western Boundary of the Louisiana Purchase, 1819-1841* (Berkeley, 1914), 33.

<sup>18</sup> This was Spain's argument, of course. Cox, *The West Florida Controversy*, 17, stated that when Britain "ceded the Floridas to Spain she mentioned no definite limits."

to him. This Spanish argument in full, buttressed by extracts of treaties and land grants, was given by McDonogh on numerous occasions.

American aggressions against the Spaniards in West Florida embarrassed the claimants. On February 24, 1804, the Mobile Act was passed despite the bitter protests of Spanish representatives in Washington. Tension slowly mounted in West Florida—American planters and military adventurers were beginning to hold secret meetings and to formulate plans for independence from Spain. Among the ringleaders were the Johnston brothers, John Hunter, Isaac, Charles, and Joseph. At John's plantation, "Troy," near the village of Bayou Sarah, the conspirators held a number of conferences.<sup>19</sup> Shepherd Brown, as an agent of the Spaniards, did his best to oppose them or at least to make the Spanish authorities aware of the danger.<sup>20</sup>

An attack was launched against the Spanish garrison at Baton Rouge on the morning of September 23, 1810. A gallant but reckless Spanish officer and one soldier lost their lives as the fort fell into the hands of the shouting, victorious Americans.<sup>21</sup> McDonogh's first intelligence of the disaster to Spanish arms came in the form of a nervous, hasty letter from Joseph Thomas, informing him that the Feliciana planters had seized Baton Rouge and its commandant, Carlos Dehault De Lassus. "I expect we shall have *Hell* to pay among us before this Business Ends," he wrote in despair.<sup>22</sup>

Events now moved rapidly. On October 27, 1810, President Madison issued a proclamation, annexing West Florida. Governor Claiborne was authorized to occupy the area and in compliance with his instructions he raised the American flag at St. Francisville on December 7, 1810. The region was reorganized as Feliciana County.<sup>23</sup> Restlessness continued in spite of this token occupation; in the spring of 1811 the inhabitants once more raised their single-starred blue flag in revolt, but Claiborne's diplomatic handling of the situation rendered it harmless.<sup>24</sup> That part of

<sup>19</sup> Stanley C. Arthur, *The Story of the West Florida Rebellion* (St. Francisville, 1935), 32-3.

<sup>20</sup> Cox, *The West Florida Controversy*, 343-44.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 398-401. The officer's name was Carlos de Grand Pré. See Arthur, *Story of the West Florida Rebellion*, 105-107.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Thomas to McDonogh, September 25, 1810, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>23</sup> Arthur, *Story of the West Florida Rebellion*, 134-38; J. W. Buel (ed.), *Louisiana and the Fair*, 10 vols. (St. Louis, 1904-1905), III, 924.

<sup>24</sup> Arthur, *Story of the West Florida Rebellion*, 151-53.

West Florida between the Mississippi and Pearl rivers was incorporated in the state of Louisiana on April 16, 1812, only four days after the state was admitted into the Union. Today it "includes the parishes of West Feliciana, East Feliciana, East Baton Rouge, St. Helena, Livingston, Tangipahoa, Washington, and St. Tammany."<sup>25</sup>

All of these developments steeled McDonogh's resolve to secure "justice" for himself and his fellow claimants.<sup>26</sup> To Senator G. A. Magruder he unburdened himself in a verbose letter dated September, 1812. He complained of the mounting costs imposed on the claimants by the perverseness of the government. "Individuals should never be made to suffer loss under an act of a government where a country or territory was in dispute as to boundary—all acts of the government in possession, where individuals were concerned, being valid and obligatory on the government claiming and establishing its pretensions, the governments having their reasons for indemnity against one another, not against individuals."<sup>27</sup> Cleverly playing on the patriotic fervor against Great Britain, McDonogh tried to show that there were British titles to the land; if the Spanish titles were quashed, the American government would be guilty of depriving its own citizens to benefit "British subjects."<sup>28</sup>

"When the national Congress met in 1816, Louisiana Senator James Brown introduced a bill to divest all claimants of grants secured after 1800. The bill, termed 'shameful and unjust' by Mc Donogh, [sic] passed the Senate but failed in the lower House."<sup>29</sup> Elia Fromentin warned McDonogh that Congress would never be persuaded to grant justice in regard to Florida land claims except "by persevering & never relaxed importunity." From Mobile, James Innerarity wrote that the Alabama delegate, William Lattimore, had grown cold to their cause, due to some fancied slight from the Pearl River Convention. Samuel H.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 153, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Fulson, "Some Studies in the Life of John McDonogh," 49-50, defended the altruism of McDonogh in this matter: "It must appear that McDonogh's interest in establishing the validity of the land claims did not proceed wholly from selfish or personal motives since . . . he was concerned over the damage to the State of Louisiana in its economic progress; and because of the solicitude he manifested for" landowners hurt by the insecurity "of their titles."

<sup>27</sup> McDonogh to Magruder, September, 1812, quoted in Edwards, *Some Interesting Papers of John McDonogh*, 14.

<sup>28</sup> McDonogh to Magruder, September, 1812, quoted in Childs, *John McDonogh*, 157.

<sup>29</sup> Kane, "John McDonogh: Land Speculator," 45.



Harper wrote to inform McDonogh that the House had failed to act on the land claims because the memorial from the Louisiana Legislature had arrived too late.<sup>30</sup>

Some optimism was felt in the spring of 1817 that Governor Claiborne, newly elected to the United States Senate, would help the embattled landholders. McDonogh did not share this optimism for any length of time. In April of that year he dejectedly stated that Congress was ill disposed to aid them and that no large claims would be confirmed. Those with claims must watch diplomatic developments as well. Negotiations involving the Floridas were underway in Washington; "the interest of those who have claims there may be deeply involved."<sup>31</sup>

Reuben Kemper had gone to Washington to look after those interests, but he arrived too late to secure action from Congress in its session during the winter of 1817. After receiving word from him, McDonogh was able to correct his friend; Innerarity mistakenly believed that Thomas R. Robertson had introduced a bill favoring the claimants. Not only was Lattimore opposing them, but also the auditors in the General Land Office, under orders of Richard Rush, acting secretary of state, were suspending claims in an "extraordinary" manner. Kemper felt that their only hope lay with President Monroe.<sup>32</sup>

Reports of treaty negotiations between Spain and the United States continued to reach McDonogh late in 1817, at which time both he and Innerarity were convinced that the Floridas would be ceded to their country. Nonetheless, McDonogh was not prepared to rejoice until he had studied the actual wording of the treaty. He was in possession of Thomas R. Robertson's letter, informing him that Secretary of State John Quincy Adams was reluctant to abandon Rush's principles for settlement of the claims.<sup>33</sup>

The harrassed Spaniards, smarting from the indignities inflicted by two American invasions of Florida (March, 1812, and November, 1814), and helpless in the face of actual American

<sup>30</sup> Fromentin to McDonogh, January 27, 1817; Innerarity to McDonogh, February 10, 1817; Samuel Harper to McDonogh, March 6, 1817, McDonogh Papers. Memorials and petitions to Congress were extensively circulated in the two years, 1816-1817. See Kane, "John McDonogh: Land Speculator," 46.

<sup>31</sup> Innerarity to McDonogh, March 25, 1817; McDonogh to Innerarity, April 4, 1817, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>32</sup> Reuben Kemper to McDonogh, April 8, September 16, 1817; Innerarity to McDonogh, April 11, 29, 1817; McDonogh to Innerarity, August 16, 17, 1817, *ibid.* Those who held British titles to the land were beginning to bring suits against those with Spanish titles. See Squire Lea[?] to McDonogh, May 29, 1817, *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Innerarity to McDonogh, August 15, October 15, 1817; McDonogh to Innerarity, November 10, 1817; Thomas R. Robertson to McDonogh, December 21, 1817, *ibid.*

possession of the disputed area, decided to relinquish that which superior force had wrung from them. They made a treaty of cession of all the Floridas in February, 1818. Article 8 gave the claimants cause for rejoicing for it held that "'All the grants of land made before the 24th. of January 1818, by His Catholic Majesty or by his lawful authorities . . . shall be ratified and confirmed.'" <sup>34</sup> When the United States discovered that the clause was designed as a shield for immense last-minute grants made to three Spanish noblemen, its determination to ignore this article burned hotly. Jackson's invasion of Florida in 1818, American "insolence," and the refusal to confirm the large grants almost destroyed the treaty. It was not ratified until February, 1821. <sup>35</sup>

To all practical purposes, the eighth article of the treaty was made a dead letter by a federal land act which allowed occupying settlers to file for pre-emptions on disputed lands. Innerarity fulminated against the Mississippi congressmen who had hastened passage of the law and also against Congress for its thinly veiled hostility. <sup>36</sup> "It is certainly a most outrageous piece of iniquity," he wailed, "that Congress should attempt to take our lands from us to make gifts of them to a parcel of intruders." <sup>37</sup> He could scarcely hide his impatience over McDonogh's weary admission that protests against such donations would do little good. <sup>38</sup>

In the 1820's some of the claimants, McDonogh included, were supporting a movement to compromise the land claims issue. They were willing to relinquish their titles to occupied lands if Congress would allow them to obtain equal value in public lands elsewhere in Louisiana or Mississippi. Because of insecure land titles, orderly commerce in real estate was hampered, population remained sparse, and development was retarded. Once the issue was settled, the region would become a prosperous garden spot. <sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Miller (ed.), *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, III, 9.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-64. John Quincy Adams was a strenuous opponent of Article VIII of the treaty. He wanted to annul all grants prior to 1802. Innerarity denounced this as "a proposition so scandalous [*sic*] that it ought to have made Mr. Adams' ink blush itself red as he wrote it." Innerarity to McDonogh, January 15, 1819, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>36</sup> Innerarity to McDonogh, February 25, May 24, 1819, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>37</sup> Innerarity to McDonogh, December 8, 1819, *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Innerarity to McDonogh, February 1, 1820, *ibid.* McDonogh now believed that the best plan was for the claimants to compromise with the settlers and to dispose of the remaining unpreempted lands at reasonable prices. See McDonogh to Innerarity, February 8, 1820, *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> McDonogh to Kinder, July 25, 1822; H. Robinson to McDonogh, September 28, 1822; McDonogh to Pierre LeBourgeois, November 3, 1828; Thomas McCaleb to Edward D. White, October 28, 1829, *ibid.* Kane, "John McDonogh: Land Speculator," 50-51.

The late 1820's found McDonogh as busy as ever on his land claims. Letters and memorials poured from his tireless pen. Many of these papers were directed to the care of Edward Livingston who received them courteously.<sup>40</sup> McDonogh, in a moment of carelessness, wrote about a fee for Livingston if he secured justice for them in Congress. The reply must have burned his ears: "Do you know my good friend that by this offer you have put it in my power to have you brought before the Senate for an attempt to corrupt the integrity of one of its members—I have however no intention of making this display of my purity at your expense . . . . It would mortify me exceedingly if I were not convinced that . . . it was intended as a compensation for some service independent of my legislative functions." Seizing on the face-saving conclusion, McDonogh swallowed his pride and meekly answered that "It certainly was" to be for "service to be rendered [by] you other than Legislative."<sup>41</sup>

No sanctuary for the claimants could be found in the courts, either. In the case of Foster and Elam *vs.* Neilson, the Supreme Court ignored Daniel Webster's argument for the claimants and decreed that the United States could interpret the treaty of San Ildefonso as it saw fit. Chief Justice John Marshall, in a minority opinion, had argued that the treaty of 1819 obligated the United States to recognize the land titles in West Florida. Richard Relf and Bernard Marigny aided McDonogh in trying the court once more through the case of Garcia *vs.* Lee. Defeat again was experienced. McDonogh continued to try, but the court refused to hear his appeals.<sup>42</sup>

One bright ray lightened the gloom of defeat for McDonogh; in the summer of 1830 he learned that Congress had passed an act for his relief, authorizing him to register two tracts of land in the St. Helena Land District. His optimism revived, he registered his lands and asked Edward D. White to use his influence with the Land Commissioner to secure a report in favor of his titles.<sup>43</sup> On September 6, 1830, McDonogh asked Thomas G. Davidson, register, and Andrew G. Penn, receiver, of the St. Helena Land Office to receive evidence in support of his claim to 720 acres just

<sup>40</sup> Livingston to McDonogh, February 6, 1826; McDonogh to Fergus Duplantier, November 10, 1829, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>41</sup> McDonogh to Livingston, November 12, December 29, 1829; Livingston to McDonogh, December 7, 1829, *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> McCaleb to Edward D. White, October 28, 1829, *ibid.* Kane, "John McDonogh: Land Speculator," 51.

<sup>43</sup> McDonogh to Henry H. Gurley, June 22, July 21, 1830; McDonogh to Duplantier, December 8, 1830; McDonogh to Edward D. White, January 7, 1831, McDonogh Papers.



below Baton Rouge and 1,200 acres on the Amite. The officials in question reported favorably on his claims, as did the House Committee on Private Land Claims, December 20, 1831. An act of Congress finally confirmed his titles to the tracts on March 22, 1832.<sup>44</sup> Claims to about 800 acres on the Bayou des Familles and 480 acres on the Bayou Barrataria, both in Jefferson Parish, were confirmed in 1835 and 1836, respectively.<sup>45</sup>

Lawyers for the claimants enjoyed scant success in getting suitable fees from their clients; almost without exception they lived to rue their connections with the whole affair. Joseph M. White ruined his health and his finances to do extensive research in Europe, so that he might find documents needed by the claimants. His bitter dismay on learning that he could expect no generous response from his clients led him to denounce them in no uncertain terms.<sup>46</sup> They had paid Daniel Webster a liberal fee for handling the case of Foster and Elam *vs.* Neilson,<sup>47</sup> yet he had "only asked for a reimbursement of money advanced, and it is refused, I cannot suppress the expression of my deep indignation and disgust," he wrote.<sup>48</sup> His point of view was regarded with sympathy by Innerarity, as indicated by the latter's gentle rebuke to McDonogh for his shabby treatment of White.<sup>49</sup>

Theodore H. McCaleb, a young lawyer filled with hope that he could succeed where others failed, came to Washington in the 1830's to do battle for the land magnates. As agent for the claimants, he flitted nervously about Washington, enlisting the aid of such congressional giants as John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, Seargent S. Prentiss, and John Quincy Adams. Lack of money forced him to live a hand-to-mouth existence sustained by doles from McDonogh. On one occasion McDonogh had to loan

<sup>44</sup> McDonogh to Thomas G. Davidson and Andrew G. Penn, September 6, November 16, 1830; Davidson and Penn to the General Land Commissioner, November 30, 1830; Resolution of the House of Representatives, December 12, 1831; Report of the Committee on Private Land Claims, December 20, 1831; Petition in behalf of McDonogh, to the Judge of the District Court of East Baton Rouge, November 30, 1840, Record Group 49, Records of the General Land Office, Louisiana Private Land Claim 3109. These records are in the Land Claims Division of the National Archives in Washington.

<sup>45</sup> John W. Noble, Secretary of the Department of the Interior, to the Commissioner of the General Land Office, May 4, 1889, *ibid.*, Claim 3113.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph M. White to McDonogh, May 25, 1833; January 31, February 10, 1834. McDonogh Papers.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph M. White to McDonogh, January 31, 1834, *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Joseph M. White to McDonogh, May 2, 1834, *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> "Supposing that the Colonel may have asked too much—have not you, considering the magnitude of the stake, offered too little?" Innerarity to McDonogh, March, 1834, *ibid.* Practically a ruined man, Joseph M. White had no choice but to continue the fight for his clients. In 1837 he was once more in Europe for research. See White to McDonogh, March 27, 1837, *ibid.*

Mrs. McCaleb \$50 to ease her destitute state.<sup>50</sup> Hounded by debts, faced with abject failure in spite of valiant efforts, and haunted by fears of the future, the young man cried in anguish: "To return home penniless to my almost destitute family with the view of recommencing business at this season of the year presents anything but a flattering or cheering prospect."<sup>51</sup>

McDonogh continued to fight in the courts. In 1838 he lost in the Supreme Court when he tried to revive the case of *Garcia vs. Lee*. Seven years later, his final attempt was blasted when the high tribunal refused to take jurisdiction in the matter.<sup>52</sup> To Jonathan Meredith, he sadly declared: "It is left me, to regret the view which the Supreme Court . . . has taken of this case . . . as it puts it forever out of my power to obtain justice . . . it [the land] would have been valuable in time to the poor, for whom I had destined it."<sup>53</sup> Although the Supreme Court in 1874 confirmed some of McDonogh's West Florida titles,<sup>54</sup> the Commissioners of the McDonogh Fund were still threshing out land claims in the 1880's<sup>55</sup> and well into the twentieth century.

Although the question of the Florida land claims occupied a significant share of McDonogh's attention over a space of forty years, the speculation in that quarter proved an expensive burden to him. Partial failure in this direction was more than balanced by a multitude of other real estate dealings in New Orleans and throughout the state. In the rapidity and scope of his purchases and sales, McDonogh once more displayed his boundless energy, his ability to enter into and control many business deals at the same time, and his acknowledged skill as a manager of a vast estate.

Numerous acts of sale, dating from the early 1800's well up into the 1840's, proved conclusively that he sold land with all the fervor of the confirmed real estate speculator. Notwithstanding this abundant evidence, one of the hardest legends about

<sup>50</sup> Theodore H. McCaleb to McDonogh, January 13, 26, March 13, 29, April 2, 12, June 3, July 9, 1838; McDonogh to Mrs. McCaleb, March 20, 1838; McDonogh to McCaleb, March 20, April 20, 1838, *ibid.* In 1845 W. Jones and Jonathan Meredith complained about McDonogh's niggardly fees. They asked an additional \$500 each. W. Jones and Jonathan Meredith to McDonogh, July 1, 1845, *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> McCaleb to McDonogh, July 9, 1838, *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> McCaleb to McDonogh, March 13, 1838; Mrs. Sarah Bella McLean to McDonogh, January 17, 1845; W. Jones and Jonathan Meredith to McDonogh, July 1, 1845, *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> McDonogh to Meredith, March 21, 1845, *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Childs, *John McDonogh*, 8-9.

<sup>55</sup> "McDonogh School Fund," *Louisiana Journal of Education*, III (December, 1881), 241. Department of the Interior, General Land Office, to B. G. Ledbetter, United States surveyor general, New Orleans, July 20, 1886, Record Group 49, Records of the General Land Office, Louisiana Private Land Claim 3113.

McDonogh has continued to flourish. According to this legend, McDonogh never sold property he had once acquired.<sup>56</sup> A letter written by him in 1838 gave birth to this fiction; writing to Colonel Charles Morgan of Pointe Coupée, he declared: "Many years since I adopted a resolution to sell no more Real Estate. I purchase (when I have the means;) but never sell."<sup>57</sup>

Vincent Nolte was acquainted with McDonogh and regarded him as a cunning speculator:

This young man was John McDonough, who made such a constant parade of the lands he had bought, so well understood the game of making fictitious sales to his friend Shepherd, at very high rates, and through him to others at still higher prices, and pursued this system, observing, at the same time, great frugality at home, so long and so skilfully, that at length real purchasers fell into his net, and made themselves part and parcel of it.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps McDonogh's dealings in plantations, or tracts suitable for plantations, were uppermost in Nolte's mind when he wrote his criticism. They began, naturally enough, with McDonogh's speculations in sugar. If others could make fortunes as sugar planters, why couldn't he? That he was making plans to purchase a sugar plantation in the winter of 1804 was revealed by Rezin Shepherd in his advice to William Taylor. Between that time and the spring of 1807, McDonogh purchased one.<sup>59</sup>

This might have been the same plantation referred to in a contract between Lewis H. Guerlain and John McDonogh Jr. and Company in 1812. It was a joint purchase from F. M. Guerin, and was to be operated by Guerlain who would pay a rent to the company for the use of its share. Before a decade had elapsed, "Governor's Bluff" was the object of an acrimonious dispute

<sup>56</sup> As late as 1943 the legend found expression in an article on McDonogh. See John S. Kendall, "New Orleans' Miser Philanthropist," *New Orleans Roosevelt Review* (August, 1943), 11. In the 1880's the legend found a place in a more scholarly journal. See "John McDonogh," *Louisiana Journal of Education*, II (May, 1880), 76.

<sup>57</sup> McDonogh to Morgan, February 7, 1838, McDonogh Papers. "My object," he wrote, "is investment, getting old as I am and unable to employ more active capital than I am now doing I place it in real estate, to sleep, until it may be wanted." *Ibid.* The legend was in full bloom by 1850. Shortly after his death, the *New Orleans Daily Delta* told its readers: "When asked if he would sell property, his invariable reply was 'I own none,—what I have acquired belongs to the Lord; I am his agent without the power of selling.'" Quoted in *Spirit of the Times*, XX (November, 1850), 464.

<sup>58</sup> Nolte, *Fifty Years in Both Hemispheres*, 86-87.

<sup>59</sup> Shepherd to Taylor, February 20, 1804, William Taylor Papers, XXIV; McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, March 30, 1807, McDonogh Papers.



among the partners. Guerlain claimed that he had purchased it from McDonogh and Brown; nor did he owe them any rent, for he had paid for all the improvements.<sup>60</sup>

Brown and McDonogh seem to have acquired several plantations by 1811; in the summer of that year they were advertising two cotton plantations, in the Amite-Comite area near Baton Rouge, for sale. They also had a waterpower sawmill and tracts of timberland for sale. One of the tracts of land offered by them was soon purchased by General Wade Hampton. Joseph Thomas, himself a purchaser of a McDonogh tract that he had built into "Bayou Barbara" plantation, informed McDonogh of Hampton's purchase.<sup>61</sup> Another interesting plantation speculation concerned Bailey's estate, located on the Mississippi River about twenty-eight miles above New Orleans. Some time in 1814 or 1815 McDonogh bought the estate, together with cotton gins and twenty-five Negroes, for approximately \$40,000. In spite of the fact that he made a large cotton crop on it in 1816,<sup>62</sup> he did not care to keep the place; therefore he offered to sell it to a friend of Richard Relf in 1817. His glowing "blurb" on the value, desirability, and beauty of the plantation sounds ultra modern in its brassy note. There were 400 acres under cultivation, tended by a corps of thirty slaves, he declared, and the mules, horses, cattle, and sheep were numerous. He had been asking \$150,000 for it, but would be glad to sell it to Relf's friend for \$100,000.<sup>63</sup>

Sales or proposed sales of plantations continued to be made through the years. In 1816 McDonogh planned to sell a plantation in Iberville Parish. Another plantation of about 2,700 acres and thirty slaves was sold to John Pemberton in 1818 for \$125,000. Ten years afterward he sought to find buyers for two 1,600-acre tracts on Bayou Nez Pique, near Opelousas. The following year his "Carthage" plantation, on the Amite River three miles from

<sup>60</sup> Act of Sale, April 8, 1812; Guerlain to Shepherd Brown and Company, January 20, 1816; Guerlain to McDonogh, April 30, 1818, *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> New Orleans *Louisiana Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, June 28, 1811. Joseph Thomas to McDonogh, September 12, 1811; Sam Crowdsot[?] to McDonogh, June 15, 1817, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>62</sup> S. [?] Bringeor [?] to McDonogh, October 5, 1815; L. A. Hopkins to McDonogh, October 13, 1815; Joseph Thomas to McDonogh, October 5, 1816, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>63</sup> McDonogh to Richard Relf, November 19, 1817, *ibid.* The Bailey plantation is "beyond a doubt one of . . . the most valuable of the Mississippi in every respect . . . enclosing a superficial of upward of 2000 arpens, the whole of which is cultivable, with soil of first quality," he wrote in ecstatic praise.

"The improvements on it are magnificent, solid and extensive. They consist of an elegant two-story brick dwelling house of great extent with balconies above and below supported by brick pillars, kitchen of two story H in brick, [and] an overseer dwelling house. Three immensely large warehouses, two cotton gins and houses [,] cotton Press, a horse cornmill and house with stories. Workhouse, Brick yard, Negro houses," *Ibid.*

Lake Maurepas, was put up for sale. Contemporaneously, he sold a sugar plantation, in Plaquemines Parish, to Andrew Durnford. Another estate near Baton Rouge was dangled temptingly before Fergus Duplantier. One of the last of McDonogh's plantation sales was made to George Urquhart in 1847.<sup>64</sup>

As rapidly as he sold plantations, he purchased others and inquired about possible buys. More than a few planters, when in need of cash or desirous of selling out, approached McDonogh to buy their estates. McDonogh's opportunities to acquire bargains were thus multiplied. In 1810 he was offered a small "plantation" for \$2,300. The following year Sam Kerr suggested that McDonogh buy his 100-acre estate and its seventeen Negro laborers. More than a decade later, McDonogh offered to buy P. E. Foucher's sugar plantation, ten miles above New Orleans, for a modest sum of money, the Barracks property (later sold to the First Municipality for \$247,000), and another piece of real estate in the city. Foucher was asking \$140,000 for his plantation and offered to take McDonogh's properties at an exchange value of \$100,000. This sale did not materialize. An auction held at Hewlett's Exchange in 1835, however, enabled McDonogh to buy a sugar plantation, thirty-five miles below New Orleans for \$10,000.<sup>65</sup>

Plantations continued to interest him during the last two years of his life. As late as February 28, 1849, Juan Y de Eganía offered McDonogh an opportunity to buy two of his large holdings. One was "Fanny" plantation, priced at \$120,000; the other was "St. Ann," valued at \$72,000.<sup>66</sup>

City real estate, both in and around New Orleans, was quite as important in McDonogh's scheme of speculations as were plantations. The peak of McDonogh's activity in city property covered the decades of the 1820's and 1830's. Some idea of the profits he was able to make in urban property can be gleaned from the fact that he bought three lots for \$1,580 in 1812 and sold them for \$12,750 in 1830.<sup>67</sup> At auctions, sheriff's sales, and private transactions, McDonogh acquired lots and even entire squares that

<sup>64</sup> Fromentin to McDonogh, May 30, 1816; Legal petition, case of McDonogh vs. P. F. T. Zacharie, January 23, 1832; McDonogh to Joseph Landry Eloi [?], October 23, 1828; W. T. Seely to McDonogh, June 18, 1829; Act of Sale, July 22, 1829; McDonogh to Duplantier, November [?], 1829 [?]; Act of Sale, April 8, 1847, *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Lurnen Spencer to McDonogh, May 21, 1810; Sam Kerr to McDonogh, April 19, 1811; Hermann, broker for P. E. Foucher to McDonogh, September 5, 1823; Act of Sale, December 12, 1835, *ibid.* McDonogh also bought a part of McCarty's plantation and Allard's estate, the site of City Park. See J. A. d'Hennecourt to McDonogh, January 23, 1850; Julien Prevost to McDonogh, n. d., *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Juan Y de Eganía to McDonogh, February 28, 1849, *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Kane, "John McDonogh: Land Speculator," 11-12.

doubled or tripled in value as the city developed into a major Southern metropolis. Many of these parcels of ground were located in the newer suburbs springing up around the old heart of the city.

McDonogh sold three lots in the suburb Delor, in 1827, for \$3,050, a handsome price, no doubt, but small compared to the average of almost \$6,000 per lot gained by the sale of eight lots in 1830 and 1832. In addition to residential sites, he could offer an attractive variety of industrial property for the tenant who desired to build his own store, factory, or warehouse. He also built many commercial establishments for rental purposes, using his own black workmen and bricks made at his brickyard in McDonoghville. Special woods and granite sills, lintels, or columns were imported from places as distant as Massachusetts. McDonogh also gambled against the river by speculating in batture lots.<sup>68</sup> On one occasion he sold five lots for 500 shares in the Union Bank.<sup>69</sup>

Thousands of acres of land throughout the state could best be sold in small lots to energetic, thrifty foreign immigrants and to newcomers from other states. McDonogh did not neglect this possibility. He "hoped to attract German immigrants to his holdings, and in the latter part of 1805 he attempted to effect a working agreement with the firm of Godfrey Haga at Philadelphia, through which a good many Germans were migrating to the New World."<sup>70</sup> He failed to get them at that time, but in 1817 he and Shepherd Brown were contemplating the importation of 500 to 1,000 German peasants on a contract calling for three years of labor on sugar plantations in return for passage money, board, upkeep, and 20 acres of land after their term of service was ended. This deal likewise failed to go beyond the planning stage.<sup>71</sup>

His desire to secure settlers for his land and his realization that better roads, canal systems, and improved means of transportation would level the barriers to fluid movement of popula-

<sup>68</sup> Act of Sale, May 19, 1827; Act of Sale, February 4, 1830; Act of Sale, August 30, 1827; McDonogh to John W. S. Napier, February 5, 1849; John P. Long to McDonogh, n. d.; receipt signed by L. Derbigny, April 26, 1826; Act of Sale, April 30, 1827, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>69</sup> Contract between Andre Darcantel and McDonogh, September 4, 1832, *ibid.* This contract was cancelled in 1832. *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 479.

<sup>71</sup> David McLellen to Shepherd Brown and Company, December 22, 1817; January 2, 5, 1818, McDonogh Papers. McDonogh's interest in attracting people from other states is seen in the following letters: Fontaine Maury to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, August 30, 1813; J. B. Prevost to McDonogh, October 6, 1815; H. [?] Turner to McDonogh, April 17, 1817, *ibid.*



tion, in addition to increasing the farmer's prosperity by enabling him to get his perishable goods to market on time, made McDonogh an ardent supporter of internal improvements. From his father he had gained an appreciation of the value of internal improvements. On the first day of the New Year, 1804, the elder McDonogh wrote to tell his son that Congress was planning to cut a new road from Baltimore to New Orleans. It would lure "thousands" to the delta state. "Then you may look out for to see If not me on my litle gray mare, thousands of others," he prophesied.<sup>72</sup>

The economic advantages of good roads were made plain to McDonogh in 1811 when his Amite lands lost prospective settlers who feared that the absence of roads would prevent them from getting their produce to market. Joseph Thomas blamed the lack of roads on Shepherd Brown whose promise to cut the needed passages was not fulfilled. However, a slight expenditure of money would remedy the situation. The labor problem would not be difficult to solve—the inhabitants by law were required to give twelve days service a year to upkeep and construction of roads and bridges. Great was the rejoicing when a shell ridge, suitable for the nucleus of a serviceable road, was discovered in the swampy lowlands. Its mere discovery seemed to have encouraged prospective settlers to make their homes in the area.<sup>73</sup>

A necessary expense in this land of conflicting titles was the hiring of surveyors—those unsung heroes of Louisiana's early development. These brave men forced their way through the thickest swamps, battling mud, water, storms, insects, and reptiles. Often they worked in lonely isolation for days, bearing the physical torments of continually wet clothing, slimy mud, and malarial fever. Their risks were great, their rewards were few. Yet without their toil land titles of any validity would not have been possible. McDonogh hired a number of capable surveyors and their letters to him frequently gave vivid flashes of the drama of their work.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, January 1, 1804, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers. Mail routes were valuable in bettering communications and in aiding both settlers and businessmen. Throughout his life McDonogh was interested in mail routes. In 1808 he suggested a shorter route, from Natchez to New Orleans, to Governor Claiborne. Thirty years later he was offering a depot site and a mail route right of way to a company. See William C. C. Claiborne to Gideon Granger, postmaster general, November 7, 1808, Dunbar Rowland (ed.), *Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne, 1801-1816*, 6 vols. (Jackson, 1917), IV, 245; Fulson, "Some Studies in the Life of John McDonogh," 27-28.

<sup>73</sup> Joseph Thomas to McDonogh, July 20, September 12, 1811, McDonogh Papers.  
<sup>74</sup> Will Roach to McDonogh, November 6, 1803; McDonogh to D. Bringier [?], April 21, 1830; John W. Watson to McDonogh, March 28, June 12, 1830; McDonogh to Watson, June 15, November 2, 1830, *ibid.*

No amount of work by himself or others could prevent his titles from acquiring a cloudiness that embroiled McDonogh in continuous litigation. Quite a number of people lent a willing ear to his enemies who claimed that none of his titles was sound and who denounced him as a peddler of lands to which he knew he had no legal right.<sup>75</sup> Most of these rumors and charges were products of envious imagination. McDonogh had a right to complain about his troubles over land titles; at times he had to buy out several claims to the same piece of land in order to clear its title.<sup>76</sup> As if this was not enough, he had to deal with people who deliberately withheld important title papers in order to ask large sums for them.<sup>77</sup>

Other troubles beset him as well. Roads had to be built or repaired and even the construction of new ones sometimes brought on lawsuits.<sup>78</sup> Within the city he had numerous tilts with the officials over taxes and city ordinances designed to protect public health and safety. Frequently he was told to fence his lots, to fill them, or to remove shacks on his property. Sometimes he was warned to clean privies on various lots.<sup>79</sup> It was evident that the city fathers had cause to dislike this Scot who must be forced on occasion to pay taxes or to comply with their ordinances.<sup>80</sup> Sometimes he was fined or haled into court.

Levees, floods, squatters, and poachers were perennial troublemakers for McDonogh. Many of the letters addressed to him from official sources concerned those earthen bulwarks gradually coalescing into a great system designed to check the swollen brown waters of an angry river at flood stage. Only much later did the state and federal governments take over this important work. In McDonogh's day the individual planters or landowners had to

<sup>75</sup> Joseph Thomas to McDonogh, December 8, 1811; G. Raoul [?] to McDonogh, April 29, 1813; Parazell Ceoder [?] to McDonogh, March 4, 1828, *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Department of Interior, General Land Office, to Ledbetter, United States surveyor general, New Orleans, July 20, 1886, Record Group 49, Records of the General Land Office, Louisiana Private Land Claim 3113. "It appears by the record in the case that McDonogh in order to perfect his title to these lands and to avoid litigation, was obliged to buy up all conflicting claims. In some instances he purchased three claims covering portions of the same land." *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> R. N. Ogden to McDonogh, May 15, 1839, McDonogh Papers. A study of McDonogh's difficulties makes one more sympathetic with his own willingness to utilize tips of governmental officials to outmaneuver rival speculators. For instances of such "inside information," see Henry Carleton to McDonogh, May 19, 1832; Henry Rightor to McDonogh, April 27, 1843; John Laidlaw to McDonogh, August 22, 1845, *ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Joseph Thomas to McDonogh, September 12, 1811; J. Vitot to McDonogh, July 8, 1814; McDonogh to Duplantier, August 18, 1828; F. D. Conrad to McDonogh, September 18, 1828; McDonogh to Conrad, September 24, 1828, *ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Treasurer of the Second Municipality to McDonogh, May 20, 1841; Mayor J. Roffignac to McDonogh, September [?] 19, 1821; H. B. Stringer to McDonogh, November 30, 1836; John Genois, recorder of the First Municipality, to McDonogh, September 28, 1844; C. S. Leonard to McDonogh, April 30, 1844, *ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Kane, "John McDonogh: Land Speculator," 36.

build and maintain the levees bordering their holdings. The system was slipshod at best and was not effective in controlling the river. McDonogh's headaches in this matter were those of other planters as well, but his character and prominence made him a target for much public denunciation.<sup>81</sup> In 1815 he was forced to publish a warning against unauthorized work on his levees.<sup>82</sup>

For poachers and squatters McDonogh had nothing but contempt; he drove them off his lands whenever possible and filed suit against them from time to time. The words "squatters' rights" did not hold a sacred place in his heart as in Stephen Douglas's in the turbulent 1850's. To McDonogh the improvements made by squatters were a trick of shiftless scoundrels to prevent a better class of men from making purchases. Joseph Thomas was informed that he would sell land to any qualified persons, without regard to the rights of squatters.<sup>83</sup>

It was a natural step from landowner to landlord; a large share of McDonogh's yearly income was represented by rents. Money from this source ranged from \$10,000 to \$40,000 in any given year. "Much of his rents came from the poorer whites and from Negroes. Mc Donogh [sic] rented dwellings of all types. He leased the Citizens' Bank Building, Mc Carty [sic] Place, a ferry landing, the Union Bank Building, the Orleans Theatre, the Mansion House Hotel, and even tables in a vegetable market."<sup>84</sup> He also rented the Barracks property to the army.<sup>85</sup> Additional rents were derived from warehouses, stores, offices, barrooms, and coffee houses.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Notice from the Orleans Parish Court to McDonogh, December 28, 1813; McDonogh to Alexander Harang [?], March 17, 1814, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>82</sup> New Orleans *Louisiana Gazette and Mercantile Advertiser*, October 7, 1815. Employing the third person, McDonogh declared that "He at [the] same time assures his fellow citizens that his determination is to place them in complete security for the future from that levee, and that the number of workmen he has employed is fully sufficient to complete the work wanted long before the rising of the river." *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Joseph Thomas to McDonogh, April 20, 1811; March 29, 1814; McDonogh to Thomas, May 1, 1811, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>84</sup> Kane, "John McDonogh: Land Speculator," 77.

<sup>85</sup> R. Kammer to McDonogh, June 6, 1828; Daniel E. Buret, quartermaster, to McDonogh, April 4, 1830; A. Davis, assistant quartermaster, to McDonogh, May 5, 1834; J. Clark, assistant quartermaster, to McDonogh, January 13, 1837, McDonogh Papers. The troops occupied the property for most of the year and in summer would depart for the Gulf coast to escape the perils of fever. McDonogh never allowed his patriotism to lessen the golden flow of rents from the Barracks property. Even when the troops were away the army had to pay for a room or two that might be needed for an office or for a storage place. Repairs were made only with reluctance, and any damages caused by the soldiers had to be paid for by the government.

<sup>86</sup> Joseph Landis and Company to McDonogh, May 31, 1839; lease, McDonogh to H. G. W. Tyler and Solomon Friend, Incorporated, January 14, 1841; [illegible name] to McDonogh, October 26, 1840; D. Van Count to McDonogh, January 30, 1841; August and others to McDonogh, December 2, 1846; M. Manovich to McDonogh, March 25, 1841, *ibid.*



Not all of his tenants found McDonogh an ideal landlord; some objected to the repeated visits from his colored agents after overdue rents; others found the rents too high; still others deplored his procrastination in making needed repairs.<sup>87</sup> Sometimes McDonogh was not to blame for his tenants' complaints. For example, a teacher refused to rent a house unless McDonogh removed a noisy, obscene, immoral Negress from the premises. Mrs. Mary Perks wanted to rent a store at 35 New Levée Street, but changed her mind when she saw the clouds of soot belched forth by the chimney of a bakery next door.<sup>88</sup>

Undoubtedly some of McDonogh's happiest successes both as a real estate speculator and as a landlord took place in his beloved McDonoghville, across the river from New Orleans. This large tract of land, shaped like a blunt slice of pie, was originally the plantation of Francis Bermoudy, from whom Brown and McDonogh purchased it on October 15, 1813. It was marked off into residential lots and on April 25, 1815, it was named McDonoghville. Brown's interest was purchased by his partner almost at the close of the same year.<sup>89</sup> It was here that McDonogh spent most of his life and it was here that he sold or leased the greatest number of urban lots.

"To the industrious and labouring classes or society" he offered long-term leases<sup>9</sup> of lots of ground in McDonoghville, at a yearly rental of 6 per cent of the value of the land. An added inducement was the safety of the town from "all danger" of floods. For those who desired larger tracts for commercial gardens, McDonogh could lease narrow strips, running back thirty or more arpents; he charged a gradually increased rent for these plots of ground. He was also willing to exchange lots for property elsewhere.<sup>90</sup>

At an auction in 1818 McDonogh sold thirty-two lots in his newly created subdivision, grossing \$53,700, at prices ranging

<sup>87</sup> F. Suarez [?] to McDonogh, October 6, 1838; Manuel Zabala [?] to McDonogh, July 17, 1844; Anderson White to McDonogh, August 2, 1844, *ibid.* A novel complaint was made by one tenant who charged that McDonogh had removed the privy from use by fencing it off from the yard. See P. Murray to McDonogh, May 3, 1833 [?], *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> F. F. [illegible last name] to McDonogh, May 31, 1830; Mrs. Mary Perks to McDonogh, January 4, 5, 1843, *ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Act of Sale, McDonogh to Thomas P. Willard, February 2, 1821; Act of Sale, McDonogh to Marie Rose Jussou, February 22, 1830, *ibid.* See Appendix B for a reproduction of a surveyor's plat of the Bermoudy plantation. McDonoghville was high in front, on the river, and sloped into low backlands covered with water most of the year. See McDonogh to John Messenger, September 29, 1837, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>90</sup> New Orleans Louisiana Courier, October 26, 1837; McDonogh to John Messenger, September 28, 1837, McDonogh Papers; Kane, "John McDonogh: Land Speculator," 20.

from \$2,400 to \$900 a lot. in 1822 he offered to sell a lot near his residence, for \$3,000. When sales began to lag in 1826, he again turned to the medium of newspaper advertising to attract buyers. Even free people of color were allowed to buy lots in his town.<sup>91</sup> McDonoghville was well known by 1840 and although it was really a suburb of New Orleans, McDonogh regarded it fondly as a "city" in its own right.

One of the most brilliant facets of McDonogh's career was his justly famous activity as a landowner and speculator. The bulk of his later fortune was built from land and rents. In many respects his role as a capitalist has overshadowed other facets of his life work—for example, his military, political, and religious affairs. It might come as a surprise to many to learn that McDonogh was a soldier, politician, and man of religion, but he was all three at one time or another in his life. Religion was a lifelong interest. Each of these three roles played by McDonogh reveal the inner man in a unique way and will be treated together.

McDonogh was one of the greatest landlords, land speculators, and real estate managers the Old South ever knew, creating from rents and land a fortune that made possible his significant educational philanthropies. In this work he displayed an amazing energy, an indomitable will, and a genius for managing a far-flung land empire.

No one has ever given a reliable estimate of his landholdings—doubtless because even an estimate would require months of research in widely scattered documents. Any attempt to discover the number of acres held by him at the peak of his career would be almost impossible because of the rapidity with which he bought and sold the same lands, and the number of fictitious sales or instances where others secretly bid for him at auctions. Furthermore, titles to many thousands of acres were never secured in his lifetime.

His disputed holdings in West Florida totaled about 200,000 acres. No close estimate of his city real estate is possible, but it was more than 10,000 acres. Holdings in a dozen or more parishes exceeded 300,000 acres. In other states he held another 100,000 acres or more. A conservative estimate of his total possessions

<sup>91</sup> Acts of Sale, January 20, 1818; McDonogh to John W. Smith, May 13, 1819; McDonogh to Agathe Fouchon [?], August 7, 1822; receipt for cash paid for advertising, N. D. Richardson to McDonogh, January 6, 1826; Act of Sale, McDonogh to Marie Rose Jussou, free woman of color, February 22, 1830, McDonogh Papers.

would reach the princely sum of 610,000 acres. Today much of that land is exceedingly valuable oil-bearing property worth many hundreds of millions of dollars.

McDonogh's character and ability again were revealed in his land speculations. He emerged from the long West Florida controversy as a shrewd gambler for high stakes in a game where one mistake might prove his ruin. He knew that Spain eventually must cede the Floridas to the United States and that Spanish officials would sell or grant large blocs of land for a few cents per acre. Likewise he knew that Americans would swarm into the region. He hoped to forestall their acquisition of clear titles and force them to buy them from him at inflated prices. He had coolly calculated every risk involved, knowing full well that the area would be in dispute. Yet he firmly believed that in time the United States must recognize his claims.

Although the press of business was great, he read, in the original French and Spanish, many treaties and all pertinent documents available on Louisiana and the Floridas. He wrote scores of letters on the subject; few Americans were as well informed on the history of the Louisiana Purchase. McDonogh might have had his moments of patriotism but in his dispute he sided with Spain against his own country. So cleverly and persistently did he fight his case that he probably saved most of the money he had expended in the gamble.

His fame as a land magnate spread to the remotest corners of Louisiana. It was a commonly accepted observation among his contemporaries that if the owner of a tract of land was not known to the prospective buyer, all the latter had to do was contact McDonogh and in the vast majority of cases the thrifty Scot would turn out to be the possessor.

In creating his huge estate he drove himself as mercilessly as he sometimes exploited his clients and those employed by him. The man was literally a dynamo of nervous and physical energy consecrated to a fixed purpose. In his lifetime that loyalty to his ideal earned for him the hatred of the public, but it brought that posthumous fame desired by his heart.



## CHAPTER III

## THE SOLDIER, POLITICIAN AND MAN OF RELIGION.

Politics proved less congenial to McDonogh's tastes than did religion—of this there can be little doubt when one considers the deep satisfaction brought to him by religious activities, and the predominantly religious color of his thought. It would be interesting to conjecture what his role in life would have been had he been reared in a New England minister's family. He might have become an outstanding Puritan divine. God and the Holy Bible were very close to him throughout his life, but especially during his formative years and in the twilight of his career. Blessed with loving, devout parents, he was thoroughly imbued with love and awe for the Creator. Many years after his parents' death he wrote: "If my mind has been virtuously disposed in life, I am indebted for it, under the Most High, to the education bestowed upon me by virtuous and pious parents (blessed be their memory!), and especially to the care they took in instructing me and having me instructed in music."<sup>1</sup>

Part of this education must have been acquired by respectful attention to McDonogh Senior as he read daily passages from the large, leather-bound family Bible. Perhaps, after the supper dishes were washed and put away, the family would gather about the father's chair while he read from the good book. In summer it might be by the smoky glare of an oil lamp; in winter by the warm glow of a wood fire that cast flickering lights and shadows over the paternal features and brought sleepy fluttering to young eyelids. The plain frame house in south Baltimore was church, school, and sanctuary to the growing brood of Elizabeth and John McDonogh. And what he learned there, John McDonogh, Jr., never forgot.

In the memoranda attached to his will he wrote that he had "walked a Presbyterian of the 'Presbyterian Church' so called, or that church, the Ecclesiastical Government of which is conducted and ruled by Presbyters."<sup>2</sup> Although he did help other

<sup>1</sup> Childs, *John McDonogh*, 3, quoted from the Will and Memoranda of McDonogh. His mother was his chief religious teacher in his childhood and to her he paid tribute: "Of my sainted mother how shall I speak! Her bosom was the seat of every virtue . . . Her children were early taught to bend the knee and to love and worship the Almighty." Also quoted in Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Will and Memoranda of McDonogh, File #4257 (Civil Court House, New Orleans), 65.

religious groups<sup>3</sup> and was active in the Episcopal Church, some of his ideas on religion, God, and man's relation to the Supreme Being were distinctly Presbyterian or Calvinistic in character.

When he was twenty-five years of age, McDonogh wrote a set of rules for the guidance of his life. These rules were later inscribed on the marble sides of his mausoleum in McDonoghville Cemetery. There is nothing unique in the rules themselves, but their perpetuation on slabs of stone reveals something of the intense sincerity of the man's soul. Life's chief object was to glorify God: "But first of all remember that the chief and great study of our life should be, to tend by all the means in our power, to the honor and glory of our Divine Creator."<sup>4</sup>

Such service to the Creator might be rendered by the education of children in the path of humility, Christian worship, and work. To Rezin Shepherd, who was about to supervise the training of two orphaned boys sent to Boston by McDonogh, the latter wrote a letter of advice. The boys were to be "'brought up strictly in the path of moral and religious rectitude'" and for accomplishing this they must be carefully indoctrinated in Christian ideals and must have a pious, devout family as a living model. He had already taught them "'the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Commandments, and to bend the knee night and morning before the Creator in prayer.'" And if a church was not too far away, "'they should be made regularly to attend divine service.'"<sup>5</sup>

Several little orphan girls were also educated by McDonogh and even though he was a Protestant, he entrusted them to the care of Roman Catholic nuns. Sometimes the good nuns of Ursuline Convent would suggest that he undertake the expense of training little orphan girls in their school. McDonogh's opinion of the Ursulines was quite high. In July, 1820, he wrote to Rezin Shepherd: "'the convent is an excellent school of morals, and many of the nuns . . . are ladies of polished minds and manners.'" He did not care for the religious teachings of Roman Catholicism, however. When Rezin Shepherd in 1832 proposed to place Gertrude Peña, one of the orphans befriended by McDonogh, in a

<sup>3</sup> See receipt B [?] Veil [?] to McDonogh, January 13, 1806, for McDonogh's contribution of \$50 for a year's "subscription for the support of the Protestant Church in New-Orleans," McDonogh Papers. According to Henry Rightor (ed.), *Standard History of New Orleans, Louisiana* (Chicago, 1900), 509, McDonogh contributed to the building fund of the Algiers Methodist Episcopal Church in the 1840's.

<sup>4</sup> "Rules for My Guidance in Life. 1804," inscribed on McDonogh's mausoleum in McDonoghville Cemetery.

<sup>5</sup> McDonogh to Shepherd, April 27, 1821, quoted in Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 38.

Catholic convent near Boston, McDonogh replied: "I have no partiality, I confess, for those people—the idea of a nun to me has through life been dreadful and that from having long observed them, been intimate with many of them and knowing them well, I therefore pay [sic] you will let it be well and peremptorily understood that they interfere not with her on the subject of religion in any way."<sup>6</sup>

Shepherd reassured McDonogh on this point, telling him that many Protestants in Boston sent their children to the convent. The Superioress of the convent wrote a charming letter that delighted McDonogh and softened his opinion, for he declared to Shepherd that the Mother Superior "appears really to be a Superior Woman."<sup>7</sup> In spite of his suspicion of Catholic teachings, McDonogh was liberal enough to educate children in convents of that church and to praise individual nuns for their work. One would have to stretch the facts considerably to label McDonogh as a religious bigot. This was done with bitter vindictiveness by a contributor to the *Daily Orleanian*, October 31, 1850, because he had not left bequests to Catholic orphanages.<sup>8</sup>

Bringing souls into the Master's fold was a glorious way of laying up a store of riches in Heaven—on this basis McDonogh rationalized the religious education of his slaves. And some of his more intelligent Negroes were to receive special training as missionaries to bring the light of the gospel to benighted Africa.<sup>9</sup> Early in the 1820's he constructed a plain brick church in McDonoghville and there he attended informal services with his Negroes, "striving to set them an example." Sometimes he made a sermon; at other times a "pious neighbor" or one of the more fluent of his blacks would conduct services.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> McDonogh to Shepherd, July 20, 1820, quoted in Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 37; McDonogh to Shepherd, August 8, 1832, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>7</sup> Shepherd to McDonogh, September 10, 1832; McDonogh to Shepherd, November 21, 1832, McDonogh Papers. Early in August, 1834, a mob of prejudiced, envious people burned the convent near Boston, scattering the nuns and girls. See Shepherd to McDonogh, August 12, 1834, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, October 31, 1850.

<sup>9</sup> McDonogh to John M. Lowrie, January [n. d.], 1840, McDonogh Papers. There were practical motives for religious education of slaves, as was pointed out by Reverend William McKenney in 1835. The South, he wrote to McDonogh, is awakening to the value of religious training for slaves. "They had seen, that moral & religious teaching, had produced, in several instances, more cheerful obedience & submission, on the part of the slaves, than the stripes and blows of the overseer." McKenney to McDonogh, March 10, 1835, *ibid.* The South's reaction to abolitionist attacks killed this promising development. Even in 1843 there was strong opposition to religious instruction of slaves. See Reverend Charles C. Jones to McDonogh, December 22, 1843, *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> McDonogh to Reverend Jones, January 26, 1835, *ibid.* It is not likely that McDonogh regularly attended a formal church in his later years as was stated by a writer for the New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, December 29, 1898.



During the summer of 1840 Elliott Cresson visited McDonogh at his residence and thanked him for "the privilege I enjoyed in witnessing your devoted . . . labors in behalf of those, who in God's providence, were placed under your paternal care." So impressed was the visitor by "the rich treat of witnessing . . . Sabbath exercises" at McDonoghville that he wrote a long letter of praise to one of the New Orleans papers.<sup>11</sup>

One Sunday morning in the summer of 1840 a Quaker visitor from Philadelphia crossed the river to McDonoghville, passed through a carefully landscaped garden, and made his way up a graveled walk to a plain, two-storied brick house. It was almost ten o'clock and the brilliant rays of a Southern sun played in patches of color and shadow on the soft, weathered brick walls. For a moment he paused before the door and then lifted the knocker. His summons was answered by a solemn Negro servant who led him into a "back pavillion" where he found the white-haired master of the establishment engaged in rather remarkable activity.

The visitor was Elliott Cresson—the host, McDonogh. The activity was the religious instruction of a swarm of black children who crowded trustingly about the long, thin legs of their pious master. Cresson was eloquent in his description of what he saw and heard:

I found the Gentleman surrounded by forty or fifty of his black slave children of different ages and sexes. . . . He was engaged in making them repeat (from memory) one, after the other, the Ten Commandments, and in Catechising of them in the christian religion: Judge my surprise Mr Editor at this scene, and on hearing little black children, many of them not more than 4 or 5 years of age, repeating the Decalogue from memory with Ease, and without the mistake of a word.<sup>12</sup>

It was McDonogh's sincere belief that he was insuring his own heavenly reward by his work in religion. This idea of working on earth to lay up riches in heaven was a recurrent theme with him. In 1821 he wrote to his intimate friend, Shepherd: "You and I have toiled together many a day in laying up riches in this world. Let us strive if possible with the assist-

<sup>11</sup> Cresson to McDonogh, October 25, August 1, 1840; "Charity" [Cresson] to a newspaper editor, n. d., McDonogh Papers.

<sup>12</sup> "Charity" [Cresson] to a newspaper editor, n. d., *ibid.*

ance of the most high to lay up some above." But faith must accompany good works for "*Works, without Faith, are dead,*" he lectured his sister, Mrs. Elizabeth McDonogh Pogue.<sup>13</sup>

Faith meant humble acceptance of God's will and unquestioning belief that he ordained all things for some great and good purpose. When Maria S. Johnston, an old Baltimore friend, wrote to him about the ills of his sister Jane Hamet, he replied that it must be God's will. "We are here below to labor, and to be happy we must fulfill his law." On the death of two of his sister Mary Cole's children, he consoled: "let us bow the head and heart in humble resignation to the Divine will, for we shall see . . . that it was all in wisdom and that infinite goodness directed for our eternal welfare, in his everlasting purposes of love and mercy."<sup>14</sup>

Any Christian who expected mercy from God must show mercy first of all to his fellow beings. In his discourse to his sisters on the subject of mercy and forgiveness, McDonogh revealed the most beautiful, the most tender and emotional aspects of his character. His other sisters had become cold toward their sister, Jane, and this harsh attitude wounded his heart. In a letter to his "beloved Betsy" he pleaded that she be kind to, forgive, and aid their afflicted sister, Jane. "Candidates for pardon and forgiveness ourselves, can we expect it . . . if we refuse pardon to one another, to our sister—never, never. Is it, that poverty is her offence, then, 'the poor shall inherit the Kingdom of heaven.'"<sup>15</sup>

Belief in immortal life was a strong part of McDonogh's religious creed and it was a belief to which he turned with increasing zeal as the years slipped by. He comforted Rezin Shepherd with the thought that "this life is not the termination of our being." When the brother of a friend died, he offered the consolation that all who died in Christ would "arise again and be forever with him." Hope of immortal life was especially sweet in weariness of old age when he longed for a cessation of toil and a reunion with his parents, in heaven.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> McDonogh to Shepherd, August 28, 1821; McDonogh to Mrs. Elizabeth Pogue, April 15, 1839, *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> McDonogh to Miss Maria S. Johnston, November 21, 1836; McDonogh to Mary Cole, May 13, 1845, *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> McDonogh to Elizabeth Pogue, April 15, 1839, *ibid.* His own charitable works would bring him "the crown promised to the merciful," Maria S. Johnston declared. Miss Johnston to McDonogh, March 1, 1843, *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> McDonogh to Shepherd, February 16, 1829; McDonogh to Christian Hoover, August 27, 1847; McDonogh to Elizabeth Pogue, April 15, 1839, *ibid.*

As one of the elect, chosen in infinite wisdom by a God who predestined all things, he could dwell happily on his final reward. Both predestination and the doctrine of the elect were peculiarly Calvinistic aspects of his faith. He did not hesitate to place himself among the stewards of the elect. Four years before his death he wrote to General John H. Cocke:

But it is not on the ordained Ministers of his Divine word alone that responsibility and a stewardship rests . . . but on laymen also and especially on certain ones among them, who [m] the most High in his mercy and love appointed to that end and gives talent, for its accomplishment, and among those he has so appointed, I have often thought and am convinced, are you, Sir, and myself.<sup>17</sup>

For a man as devoted to his Protestant concepts of religion as as was McDonogh, the absence of any church other than Roman Catholic in early New Orleans must have been appalling. Other Americans reflected on the situation, too, and in 1805 a meeting was held to remedy the situation. Because the majority of those attending were Episcopalians, an appeal was sent to the Episcopal Church in New York. Reverend Philander Chase was sent to New Orleans and held his first service in the Cabildo, November 17, 1805.<sup>18</sup>

The Episcopal Congregation of Christ's Church Cathedral was incorporated that same year by act of the territorial legislature. Among the founders and first vestrymen were McDonogh, Richard Relf, Edward Livingston, Rezin Shepherd, and William Donaldson.<sup>19</sup> Five years later the legislature granted permission to this lusty new arrival on the New Orleans religious scene the right to conduct a lottery to raise \$10,000.<sup>20</sup>

According to one legend, McDonogh in his old age became a communicant of St. Peter's Episcopal Church formerly at the corner of Esplanade and Levée streets.<sup>21</sup> This little church, the forerunner, of St. Anna's Church, became known as the Seamen's Bethel. The legend cannot be verified because the records have

<sup>17</sup> McDonogh to General John H. Cocke, March 20, 1846, *ibid.* For an indication of his belief in predestination, see McDonogh to Mrs. Sarah Bella McLean, May 6, 1844, *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> "The Founding of the Church in Louisiana," *The Diocese of Louisiana*, Convention Number, Vol. XXX (New Orleans, October, 1925), 11. This periodical is put out by the Episcopal Church in Louisiana. See also "The First Protestant Sermon Preached in New Orleans," *De Bow's Review*, After the War Series, Vol. VIII (April-May, 1870), 394-96.

<sup>19</sup> *Louisiana Acts*, 1805 (New Orleans, 1805), 88, 90; Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 64, n. 1; Fulson, "Some Studies in the Life of John McDonogh," 25-26.

<sup>20</sup> *Louisiana Acts*, 1810 (New Orleans, 1810), 42, 44.

<sup>21</sup> Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 60; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, August 10, 1873.



been lost, but it is true that one of McDonogh's friends became a communicant in 1848. If McDonogh did join the Episcopal Church, it is quite possible that this friend, James Shepherd, encouraged him to do so. An Episcopalian minister, Reverend James Whitall did bury McDonogh,<sup>22</sup> but this cannot be used as proof that McDonogh was an Episcopalian communicant.

If McDonogh supported the Episcopal Church in New Orleans because it was the first non-Roman Catholic organization in the city, one would have expected him to leap at an opportunity to found a Presbyterian body. This seemingly was not the case, for the act of incorporation of New Orleans's first Presbyterian Church did not list him among the founders.<sup>23</sup> Undoubtedly he did support the Presbyterian cause financially, but his name became linked more closely with Episcopalianism.

Husky, blue-eyed Reverend Larned was the first Presbyterian minister to captivate New Orleans Protestants with his deep-voiced oratory. His heroic refusal to flee the yellow fever epidemic of 1820 cost him his life. His successor was the author-preacher, Reverend Theodore Clapp, whose prominent features became familiar to thousands of Orleanians. Endowed with a superior education and an inquiring mind, Reverend Clapp impressed his congregation even though he was hostile to the New England brand of Calvinism. Eventually he became a Unitarian. Both McDonogh and Judah Touro were his friends and it was the latter philanthropist who aided his church when it was in financial difficulties.<sup>24</sup>

Religion was important in McDonogh's life, in spite of the fact that he was a successful capitalist. Christian ideals softened the harsher aspects of his character and made him a man of greater stature than any mere pursuit of money could have done. Much credit for his devoutly religious nature must be given to his family environment. The same thing can be said for his devotion to education, science, mechanics, and technology. Because his activi-

<sup>22</sup> "Deaths Register, St. Anna's Episcopal Church Register, March 26, 1846 to January 28, 1867," 7. This volume is in the possession of the Reverend Arthur Price, rector of St. Anna's Church. Episcopal ministers may bury persons not communicants of their church.

<sup>23</sup> *Louisiana Acts*, 1818 (New Orleans, 1818), 10.

<sup>24</sup> Rev. Theodore Clapp, *Autobiographical Sketches and Recollections* (Boston, 1857), 12, 26-29, 48, 55-56, 93-94. Speaking of New England Calvinism, Clapp declared: "In New England, generally, at the period I am referring to, the first impression which children, almost without exception, received of God, was that of a Being from whom they had less to hope, and more to fear, than from all the wicked men and demons in the universe." *Ibid.*, 12.

ties as an educator were oftentimes intimately related to his religious concepts, the discussion of the former quite naturally develops from the latter.

As a politician, McDonogh exhibited many of the selfish, grasping qualities that marked his capitalistic career; on the other hand, as soldier and "priest" he rose to high levels both morally and intellectually. If these facets of his career teach us anything, they tell us that his was a complex character, alloyed both of good and bad.

Military glory was not a Holy Grail to him for he did not care for bloodshed any more than he desired the strife and heat of the political arena. He was mildly pacifistic in attitude, yet was possessed of undoubted physical courage. And where his fortune was not involved, he displayed a level-headed patriotism.

God came before life and country in his thoughts. Nothing that he did gave him so much spiritual satisfaction as playing the part of a religious tutor, be it to his own sisters and brothers or to orphans and slaves. Religious hypocrisy was foreign to him—he was a sincere advocate of Christian principles. There were contradictions between his principles and some of his actions but he was not aware of the discrepancies. Religious instruction of slaves made them more docile, efficient laborers and hence benefited him financially, but he could rationalize this fact so that it did not shake his belief in his own piety.

McDonogh was most successful and happy as priest and educator. Out of these two facets of his life's work grew that unusual scheme of educational philanthropy to which he devoted the fortune he had accumulated. He would not quarrel with a grateful posterity which has immortalized his name in the schools of two cities.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EDUCATOR AND DABBLER IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

McDonogh's success in later life has led some writers into believing that he had received an excellent formal education, but on the basis of the scanty evidence available it seems that McDonogh was a self-educated man, whose intelligence and ambition enabled him to build on a moderate amount of "common

school" education.<sup>1</sup> His parents first instilled in him a love of good books and an appreciation of the social as well as the utilitarian value of education.<sup>2</sup>

Like many of today's parents, who desire to give their children greater educational opportunities than they themselves have enjoyed, McDonogh's mother and father labored diligently to secure the best training for each member of their large family. Nothing is known concerning the education received by John and Elizabeth McDonogh, although a few conclusions may be drawn from their letters. Both of them were literate, being able to read and to write. The handwriting of each is legible and neat but the poor spelling, punctuation, and grammar reveal a lack of formal schooling. In spite of their own handicaps, they succeeded in creating an abiding faith in education in the mind of John McDonogh, Jr.

Once he had established himself in New Orleans, McDonogh began to polish his mind as well as his manners. Gifted with an "unusual intelligence" and "an extraordinary memory,"<sup>3</sup> the young man had little difficulty in acquiring a working knowledge of French and Spanish—invaluable aids in commercial intercourse. He was an eager reader and enjoyed many profitable hours in the library he had begun to accumulate with the money flowing into his coffers. In the summer of 1806 he purchased more than \$200 worth of outstanding literary classics, including Alexander Pope's *Homer*, John Dryden's *Vergil*, Plutarch's *Lives*, Robert Burns's *Works*, and Edward Gibbon's monumental study of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.<sup>4</sup> From passages in his letters one might assume that he did not neglect books of a scientific, military, and technological nature.

His love for books led him to regard gifts of volumes as worthy contributions to educational institutions. On several occasions during the 1840's he made substantial gifts of handsomely

<sup>1</sup> Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 454, came closest to the truth when he stated that McDonogh seemed "to have received a good, common-school education." His authority for this statement was Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Vivian M. Deano, "Educational Interests of John McDonogh" (M. A. thesis, Tulane University, 1941), 8. "It appears that his family, and especially his father, was the first and perhaps the greatest factor in the focusing of John McDonogh's [*sic*] interests on education." *Ibid.* This thesis is the best available study of McDonogh as an educator.

<sup>3</sup> "Magazine Section," *New Orleans Item*, June 28, 1925, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Deano, "Educational Interests of John McDonogh," 13-14. As he grew older and became absorbed in African colonization and schemes of philanthropy, McDonogh turned almost entirely to works of a religious nature. A visitor to his personal chambers a day or two after his death wrote: "On one of the tables were strewn many books, several of which we opened . . . Not one of them, treated of literature, romance or history, they were religious, strictly of biblical cast—testaments, prayer books, church exercises, hymns and bibles." *New Orleans Daily Orleanian*, October 30, 1850.



bound volumes to the Public School Lyceum and Library. I. Baldwin, recorder of the Second Municipality, expressed his gratitude to McDonogh, both for his encouragement of Baldwin's efforts in behalf of public education and for his gifts of books, by inviting him to be present at "an Examination of the Public Schools of the Second Municipality" in 1842.<sup>5</sup>

His theories of education played an important part in turning McDonogh's thoughts to educational philanthropy, for he had arrived at the conclusion that education was a sort of panacea for many of the ills of urban society. Here, then, was a great field to institute works of lasting benefit to mankind; educate the children of the poor, give them vocational training and moral guidance, and crime would vanish from the earth.<sup>6</sup> From his own experiences in New Orleans and Baltimore, McDonogh was aware of the unwholesome environment in which the youth of port cities lived and he drew a connection between the ignorance of the people and the high incidence of crime, disease, and poverty.

One winter day in 1838 he happened to read an article in the *Colonization Herald* of Philadelphia; it was a somber study that emphasized the rising crime rate among apprentices due to lack of moral guidance and education. One passage in particular stirred McDonogh's soul to the depths and set him to thinking seriously of the problem. "Until the State provides for the education of all its people . . . and sees that everyone is obliged to be brought up to some sure and competent livelihood," the article declared, "it is folly . . . to talk about prison discipline." To this paper McDonogh penned a striking conclusion:

*On visiting Be [Baltimore] see to this. Establish a Library Reading Room, Lyceum &c., for apprentices, and Endow it with Real Estate there.—say 100,000, for a Library, Books Do, 100,000 for a fire proof building, no wood, to be used in it 100,000 to be Invested in Real Estate, in Balto Houses yielding Rents, which shall never*

<sup>5</sup> Deano, "Educational Interests of John McDonogh," 51. Thomas Sloo, Jr., to McDonogh, January 5, 1840; Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Public Schools of the Second Municipality, January 3, 1846, enclosed in a letter of Baldwin to McDonogh, January 6, 1846; Baldwin to McDonogh, May 20, 1841, June 25, 1842, McDonogh Papers. If anyone should be tempted to sneer at these gifts as trivial, he might note that in December, 1844, McDonogh was an anonymous contributor of \$1,000 to the Public School Lyceum and Library. See Deano, "Educational Interests of John McDonogh," 50-51; Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 58; New Orleans, *Daily Picayune*, October 30, 1850.

<sup>6</sup> Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 55; Deano, "Educational Interests of John McDonogh," 64-65.

be sold or alienated; the Revenue of which, will annually add to the Books & pay Expenses of Professors, Librarian, &c., &c.<sup>7</sup>

James T. Edwards believed that McDonogh "was inflexible in his theories of education,"<sup>8</sup> but the evidence does not support this contention. Rather, it can be shown that McDonogh's educational theories were developed gradually and were altered as his experience and increasing maturity gave him new, deeper insights into the training of young people. "His criteria for education were morality and utility, but some of his plans included guidance, recreation and culture as well."<sup>9</sup> The same type of education must not be rigidly applied in all cases, McDonogh insisted, but rather, training should be adapted to the individual. To Shepherd he wrote in 1821: "'I am decidedly of the opinion that the education offered to individuals should be made to correspond to the gifts and intentions of Nature, some being destined, it would appear, for the learned professions, others for merchants, traders, soldiers, mechanics, farmers, etc., etc.'"<sup>10</sup>

Whatever theories McDonogh applied to the field of education, two factors colored all of them—one was the gospel of work and the other religion. The latter is best seen in his letter of April, 1821, to Shepherd, outlining the moral and religious training of the orphan boys he had sent to Boston. As for the gospel of work, he continually preached it to his brothers and sisters. To Mrs. Jane Hamet in 1834 he wrote: "Bring up your children therefore in the fear of the Lord, to industry and hard labor and give them a trade, and if they are virtuous they will find their way through the world; the most high never abandons the virtuous man . . . . I have found that happiness is only . . . to be found in this world in the cabins of the industrious and virtuous poor."<sup>11</sup>

McDonogh was not in advance of his day in regard to his opinions of women and his theories of female education.<sup>12</sup> In general he believed that "a plain education and a moral one was

<sup>7</sup> "Statistics of Crime and Punishment," *Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine* reprinted in the *Philadelphia Colonization Herald*, November 21, 1838, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>8</sup> Edwards (ed.), *Some Interesting Papers of John McDonogh*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Deano, "Educational Interests of John McDonogh," 33.

<sup>10</sup> McDonogh to Shepherd, April 27, 1821, quoted in Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 39.

<sup>11</sup> McDonogh to Mrs. Jane Hamet, March 2, 1834, McDonogh Papers; also quoted in Edwards (ed.), *Some Interesting Papers of John McDonogh*, 108. In this same letter McDonogh said: "Had I fifty sons I would bring them up to hard labor and industry . . . . Giving them trades and nothing more."

<sup>12</sup> Surprisingly modern, however, was his advice concerning feminine opinions. "Ladies you know will have their own way and their own opinions and a wise man will never contend when these opinions are innocent." McDonogh to Shepherd, April 14, 1833, McDonogh Papers.

all that" women needed.<sup>13</sup> He was disturbed when Shepherd proposed to have his daughter taught Greek and Latin. "The idea of giving her Latin and Greek alarms me," McDonogh wrote. "Few women can support it properly in their walk through life, and in most instances that have come under my observation it has been the cause of unhappiness to them . . . . It often retards their settlement in life; often hinders a good man who has received but a plain education from addressing them; and even where this does not take place, it is after marriage the source of discontent and unhappiness." Shepherd did not share his friend's apprehension about the danger of classical learning for women.<sup>14</sup>

McDonogh's first experience as an educator came in the very early 1800's when he acted as his father's right hand in the training and guidance of his younger brothers. "As the eldest son" he "was frequently consulted in regard to the education of the younger members of the large family. He formulated plans for their education."<sup>15</sup> Except in the case of his brother William, McDonogh did not succeed in holding his brothers by his side or in winning love and affection from them. He was asked to exercise rigid discipline over high-spirited youngsters who had come to New Orleans to escape paternal control at home and who wished to taste the pleasures of the port city. They might listen to the father, but the older brother was not going to tie them down to prosaic clerks' jobs while he enjoyed the rich social offerings of New Orleans. They rebelled against him and departed after relatively short stays.

Joseph, four years younger than McDonogh, was the first of the brothers to be placed in his care. On December 30, 1801, McDonogh Senior wrote to his eldest son, telling him that Joseph had defied a spell of sickness in his eagerness to go to New Orleans and that he had departed on a tiny ship, the *Maria*. "I now Depend that you will take great care of him, that you will put him forward, and try to Improve him in his writeing and I alow that he Shall be under you, and Directed Entirely by you in all things." Two years later, some progress had been made, for the father highly praised Joseph's handwriting. At the same time he criti-

<sup>13</sup> Deano, "Educational Interests of John McDonogh," 21-22.

<sup>14</sup> McDonogh to Shepherd, July 20, 1820, quoted in Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 37-38; Shepherd to McDonogh, September 12, 1820, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>15</sup> Deano, "Educational Interests of John McDonogh," 15; Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 15.



cized his eldest son for his failing in this respect. "Yr. last letter you wrote me was wrote So bad I could Scarce Read it," he complained.<sup>16</sup>

McDonogh Senior recommended the study of French and Spanish and to spur Joseph in his studies had promised to send a desk to him. When he was informed that Joseph was learning French, he was overjoyed. "I hope he will make himself Master of it," he wrote on October 25, 1803, "and I make no Doubt but you are by this time veary compleat at Both the French & Spanish Languages for you may be Shure that those Languages will be of great use to you and Joseph." The fact that Joseph had passed through the fever period of the summer of 1803 also gratified him.<sup>17</sup>

A rude shock awaited the elder McDonogh in 1804 when Joseph quarreled bitterly with his brother and returned home. Once back home, however, the young man experienced a change of heart. On April 1, 1804, he wrote to his brother, describing his stormy trip home and expressing hurt surprise that he had found no letters from McDonogh or Brown waiting for him. On April 26, 1804, he took passage on the *Fame*, bound for New Orleans. William Taylor had loaned him \$140 for expenses and had charged the sum to McDonogh.<sup>18</sup> The two young men soon were at odds again and Joseph remained only two months before returning home for a second time. In August, 1804, the father expressed his pained surprise at this development, but was willing to accept McDonogh's account of the quarrel. "I am veary Sorrey that it So hapend that he did not Sute you and that he could not live with you in Happeyness, but Joseph is off a fractious hastey temper." Joseph still had not become reconciled with his brother in 1805. He might have visited New Orleans again, but he preferred to settle in the West, rather than make a home either in Baltimore or in New Orleans.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, December 30, 1801; February 16, 1802; January 8, 1803, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers. In 1805 the father still found fault with McDonogh's penmanship and letter writing: "take notice to every Sentence of my letter and when you give me an answer, write a little plainer to me." McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, March 25, 1805, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, January 8, October 25, 29, 1803; February 15, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Shepherd to William Taylor, February 27, 1804, Taylor Papers, XXIV; Joseph McDonogh to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, April 1, 1804; William Taylor to John McDonogh Jr. and Company, April 8, 29, 1804, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>19</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, August 26, 1804; March 25, 1805; September 14, 1807, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers. McDonogh Senior was not blind to the fact that his eldest son was sometimes too authoritarian and unyielding in his relations with his brothers. In his own tactful fashion, the father tried to advise McDonogh to show a more charitable attitude. "Keep up a frendly coredondance with your Brothers by writeing; If any of them Should be Remiss, Negligent, or missbehave, If this I Say Should be the case pray do you not forget nor neglect Showing your frendship, and giveing your good advice to them, at Every Opertunity." McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, September 10, 1804, *ibid.*

As many as three of McDonogh's brothers were under his guidance at one and the same time in New Orleans. Before Joseph had returned to Baltimore, seventeen-year-old Henry (called "Harry" by his father) left the Maryland port for New Orleans. He was a wild, unruly boy, McDonogh Senior hinted in his letter of January 1, 1804. After a brief stay in New Orleans, Henry returned to Baltimore and signed aboard the *Carlisle* for a trip to Amsterdam. His father was hopeful in August, 1804, that the captain of the vessel would be able to tame him. During one of his voyages to Europe, Henry temporarily vanished, after writing to his father, from Amsterdam. His ship must have been seized by a French privateer, because in 1809 he was a prisoner in France, according to a letter of John Craig to McDonogh twenty-six years later.<sup>20</sup> There is some evidence that Henry returned to Louisiana in 1817 or 1818.<sup>21</sup>

Thomas, the third of McDonogh's brothers, joined Joseph and Henry in New Orleans in 1803. Thomas and McDonogh both fell seriously ill in October of that year. This threat of annihilation of his sons by disease prompted the worried father to write on October 25, 1803: I fear "that New Orleans will become a grave for Someone If not all off you." A few days later he continued to express concern for Thomas and asked McDonogh to send news of him. In the summer of 1804 Thomas was again in Baltimore studying navigation, but all the while deeply dissatisfied with his position in Taylor's employ and hinting that he would quit his post as second mate on one of Taylor's ships.<sup>22</sup>

His father had promised a new suit and Mr. Taylor had been quite generous with him, but the young man would not listen to reason. McDonogh did his best to dissuade Thomas from his foolhardy plans, without the slightest success. Taylor was justifiably angered by Thomas's betrayal of his trust and threatened to cut off his pay or force him to serve out his lost time. Furthermore, the young man might suffer the fate of impressment aboard a British warship. For more than a year there was no news from Thomas and in 1807 the father sadly concluded that he either had been lost at sea or had been "pressd on Board of [a] British Man of War."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, October 29, 1803; January 1, August 26, 1804; July 2, 1805; September 14, 1807, *ibid.*; Craig to McDonogh, January 24, 1835, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>21</sup> John Pemberton to McDonogh, March 3, 1818, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>22</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, October 25, 29, 1803; August 26, 1804, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers.

<sup>23</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, March 25, July 2, 1805; September 14, 1807, *ibid.*

Stories of exotic New Orleans and of John's success there created a restless longing in even the younger McDonogh brothers. Little James, not quite fifteen years old, had already grown tired of school and parental control. In February, 1804, his father found him quite rebellious and threatening to be off on a voyage. As McDonogh had been insistent in asking for his youngest brother, William, with whom the parents could not bear to part, they sought to delay his acquisition of this beloved child of their old age by allowing James to sail for New Orleans in the summer of 1804, hoping that the boy would satisfy John and take his mind off William. In August, 1804, McDonogh Senior wrote that he was sending James in place of William. According to him James was a fair student in school, and was eager to serve his brother. "I hope you will not miss to have him Educated as well as you posable can, now in his young days . . . . I hope he will like the place and that it may be of great Searvice to him, and that you may be fulley Satisfieed for your trouble and Expence."<sup>24</sup>

Little James suffered either from an infection of the middle ear or from a perforated eardrum, a condition brought on by a severe cold he had had several years before. His hearing was impaired and he suffered from a draining infection in one ear. McDonogh was informed of his condition in December, 1804, and told to "take great care" of the boy. In March, 1805, the worried father asked John to look into his brother's condition. He reassured the old man, indicated that he was pleased with James, and that the boy would receive the best education available. Once more the father promised a desk to encourage his son's study.<sup>25</sup>

Progress in James's education did not satisfy McDonogh Senior in 1805. He wrote a lengthy appeal to his son John, urging him to consider this matter:

I wish you would pay some attention to yr. Brother James Education, for I do not find that he is yet going to any School, and I am afraid it will be Entirely Neglected untill it will be too late, If he does not Some more Learning now in time he will will [*sic*] be lost, and I Depend upon you to take care of his Morils and to see how he spends his time on Sundays pray Encourage him to go to Church or meeting and to Read Historay and all

<sup>24</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, February 15, August 26, 1804, *ibid.* James became violently seasick on the voyage, but arrived safely in New Orleans. See McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, September 10, December 10, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, December 28, 1804; March 25, 1805, *ibid.*



good Books. I wish him to be Religeous, and I know and am shure that he bids fair to make a good man If properly Managed.<sup>26</sup>

McDonogh seemed determined to lure William from the loving arms of his parents, but was unable to do so while they lived. McDonogh Senior insisted that this was out of the question because Billy was a small child barely able to read and his mother could not bear to part with him. "I hope," the old man wrote plaintively, "that you do not mean to Encourage all my Sons to leave me, it is to me nearly the Same as If I had lost all my four oldest Sons." Elizabeth McDonogh was also worried about William's contracting smallpox; he had not been inoculated for the disease and she refused to let him undergo the preventative treatment. Perhaps in time she could be convinced that it was best for William to go to New Orleans.<sup>27</sup> In 1806 McDonogh's mother wrote a heartbroken letter that might have led him to abandon his efforts to take William away.<sup>28</sup> At any rate, William did not come to New Orleans until after his parents' deaths in 1808 and 1809.<sup>29</sup>

John lavished a surprising amount of affection on his little brother, almost eighteen years his junior, hiring capable tutors for him, dressing him like a fashionable young genetleman, and planning to make a scholar or professional man out of him.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps he saw in William his own successor who might take over and manage his estate in the philanthropic enterprises for which he was gathering his fortune. The boy came to him late in 1809 or very early in 1810, for in January of the latter year he received two weeks' dancing lessons. His education was now placed in the hands of L. F. T. Le Fort with whom William boarded while absorbing a college preparatory training. Board, tuition, and supplies were costing his older brother about \$160 every six months.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, July 2, 1805, *ibid.* Lack of news about James caused the old man much concern. In 1807 he begged for information on James's health and progress. See McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, September 15, 1807, *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, February 15, August 26, 1804, *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Wilkins McDonogh to McDonogh, April 7, 1806; McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, September 14, 1807, *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Fulson, "Some Studies in the Life of John McDonogh," 6.

<sup>30</sup> Deano, "Educational Interests of John McDonogh," 17-19.

<sup>31</sup> Receipt for cash paid for dancing lessons, Dubinz to McDonogh, February 3, 1810, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers. Receipts for board, tuition, and supplies, Le Fort to McDonogh, September 12, 1810; March 12, September 19, 1812; March 12; September 12, 1813, McDonogh Papers.

In 1813 a rumor of William's death circulated among McDonogh's friends in Baltimore. To Alexander Fridge, the legal guardian of his brother, McDonogh wrote that William was well and that preparations should be made for his entrance at Princeton College. A few days later McDonogh wrote another letter explaining that he was sending William to Baltimore to continue his preparations for Princeton because he was deeply interested in Billy's advancement in life. An additional reason for sending him North for a higher education was the lack of a college for young men in New Orleans. Higher learning was not desired by William, nor did he seem possessed of the mental requirements necessary for scholarship, Fridge was forced to admit in 1815. William figured and wrote slowly; perhaps it would be best to set him up in business as he desired.<sup>32</sup> In spite of his bitter disappointment, McDonogh gracefully accepted the fact, and allowed his brother to give up his studies.

William returned to New Orleans and with the help of his brother became a successful merchant but died of cholera in the serious yellow fever-cholera epidemic of 1832. The attack must have come suddenly, for McDonogh, only a short distance away, had to be summoned hastily to his bedside. There was no explanation, no friendly consolation, to soften the jolting shock of the bad news—only a brief note written in haste: "Sir your Brother William is now lying at the point of death unless [you] come Immediately you will not see him alive."<sup>33</sup> Tears must have blinded McDonogh's eyes as he hastened to the bedside of his dying brother.

None of McDonogh's sisters ever visited New Orleans, but he showed toward them the same tender affection that he showered on William. His youngest sister Margaret (affectionately called "Peggey" by the family) was his favorite and he followed her education with interest after she entered school in 1806. She in turn loved her brother and, while still a young girl, wrote letters to him.<sup>34</sup> After his parents' deaths, he bore the expense of Mar-

<sup>32</sup> Fridge to McDonogh, December 18, 1813; April 8, 1815; McDonogh to Fridge, February 14, 25 [?], 1814, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Diamond to McDonogh, June 16, 1832 [?], John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers; McDonogh to Shepherd, November 21, 1832; John Cole to McDonogh, December 5, 1832, McDonogh Papers; Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 28. At his death William left an estate of \$30,000, most of which went to his sister, Mrs. Mary Cole. See Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 36, n. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Wilkins McDonogh to McDonogh, April 7, 1806; McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, September 14, 1807, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers.

garet's education, spending as much as \$826 in a single year for this purpose.<sup>35</sup> As late as the 1820's he was still paying for the education of some of his nieces and nephews.<sup>36</sup>

One of McDonogh's most interesting philanthropic activities was his education of orphaned boys and girls—a charitable enterprise illustrating his pity and compassion for unfortunate children. His role as educator and foster father of orphaned children began about 1816 when he placed several girls in Ursuline Convent. He also took two little boys into his home, taught them as much as his limited time would allow, and then sent them to Boston so that his friend Shepherd might superintend their further training.<sup>37</sup> On April 27, 1821, McDonogh wrote to Shepherd:

This will be handed you by my two orphan children, whom I informed you last July I would send you the present spring, and whom you were so good as to say you would be a father to. The eldest, James McDonogh Drehr, is about seven years of age; he lost some years since both father and mother (and since the death of [Shepherd] Brown I have striven to replace both him and them). The other, Francis Peña, is about five years old; he lost, some years since, his father. They are both descendants of virtuous and respectable people, and as relates to them, I well know all that is necessary for me to say to you is that I wish them to be brought up as my own (or as yours).<sup>38</sup>

Frank and James arrived in Boston on June 7, 1821, and were hospitably received by Shepherd, who made immediate plans to place them at Barnstable. Within a few months the boys' guardians were aware that there was a radical difference between them. James was docile and "easily governed," whereas Frank was sullen, uncooperative, and given to throwing tantrums that obliged his tutors to punish him.<sup>39</sup> As busy as he was, McDonogh wrote long letters to his boys, trying to guide them through the difficult period of adjustment to new surroundings. The corre-

<sup>35</sup> Fridge to McDonogh, December 2, 1817; April 13, 1818; McDonogh to Fridge, March 13, 1818, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph and James Pogue to McDonogh, November 2, 1823, *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 36; Deano, "Educational Interests of John McDonogh," 20-21; Childs, *John McDonogh*, 200. On July 20, 1820, McDonogh wrote to Shepherd, "The bringing up of these children in the path of rectitude and virtue is an object near to my heart." quoted in Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 37.

<sup>38</sup> McDonogh to Shepherd, April 27, 1821, quoted in Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 38. See Shepherd to McDonogh, September 12, 1820, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>39</sup> Shepherd to McDonogh, June 7, October 12, 1821, McDonogh Papers.



spondence between these children and the busy man of affairs showed McDonogh in a kindly, gentle light which would have astonished those who saw only his cold, austere exterior.

A neat, rather mature letter was sent by James Drehr to his benefactor, October 14, 1821. Little James informed McDonogh that he and Frank had arrived safely and were now busy at school. Nor was their religious training being neglected, for "Mr. Sewall, the minister of the Parish frequently examines us, gives us advice and instructs us in what manner we ought to live to become good children in this world and happy in another." James also remembered the oft-repeated advice that he be grateful for his own good fortune and that he share what he had with the poor. "I frequently meet with poor children in the street and I think I can willingly give them a part of what I have when I remember [that] but for your kindness I should be as poor as they now are."<sup>40</sup>

After 1821 little was heard from James, although Frank remained in Massachusetts for a number of years and was joined by his sister, Gertrude, whom McDonogh had sent to Boston after a period of training in Ursuline Convent. On August 20, 1828, McDonogh sent a \$300 check to Boston to pay for the current expenses of Frank and Gertrude. The following year a check for \$500 was mailed and duly received by the faithful Shepherd. Like sums were expended in 1830 and 1831.<sup>41</sup>

All of McDonogh's expenditure of money and time in behalf of Frank ultimately proved in vain for the boy turned out to be almost below average in intelligence and without a spark of ambition. So poorly did he do at Barnstable that Shepherd in October, 1828, decided to place him in another school where it might be determined what sort of education best suited him. He was placed with a tutor in Cambridge and when he had been there several months Shepherd reported "that nature never intended him for a scholar." Therefore his studies were to be

<sup>40</sup> Drehr to McDonogh, October 14, 1821, *ibid.*; also quoted in Childs, *John McDonogh*, 205. McDonogh gave each boy a small weekly allowance, hoping that he might learn the ideals of thrift and charity with the money. To Shepherd he wrote: "I will thank you to request 12½ cents in money a week (that is every saturday) be given to each of the boys as pocket money, and that it be strongly recommended to them (although they will be left at liberty to use it as they see fit) to put it to charitable uses by seeking out poor people or poor children to give it to, as the only returns (after a grateful heart) they can make to the almighty for having raised them up friends." McDonogh to Shepherd, August 28, 1821, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>41</sup> McDonogh to Shepherd, August 20, 1828; Shepherd to McDonogh, August 30, 1829; January 2, 1832, McDonogh Papers.

confined "to a firstrate [*sic*] English and practical education." In August, 1829, he suggested that Frank be placed in a store, after year's preparation.<sup>42</sup>

McDonogh had changed his mind about Frank's capabilities and told Shepherd to place the boy in a hardware or grocery store. Shepherd promised to find a position during the summer of 1830 but by October of that year he had not succeeded. Instead, he had placed him in a countinghouse, at the same time boarding him with a respectable family. In March, 1831, he reported that Frank was doing well in Lowell and Gardner's countinghouse. McDonogh still wanted him trained in a hardware or grocery store, feeling that he would have a better opportunity to make money at such a business in New Orleans. Shepherd continued to have more faith in the lad, arguing that he was too good for such work. McDonogh reluctantly agreed to Shepherd's plans for Frank.<sup>43</sup>

By August, 1831, Frank's failure had become apparent even to Shepherd, who remarked that "There is something radically wrong with his disposition." About one month later he wrote: "The boy does not appear to do anything wilfully wrong, but there is such a total want of mind and capacity that I much fear it will be impossible to qualify him for any kind of business . . . . Nothing appears to interest him. Advice or direction may as well be given to a block of wood, the most simple commission is not properly executed."<sup>44</sup>

This news brought McDonogh to an abrupt decision. Almost curtly he wrote that the boy should be returned home at once "as his mother, who is extremely poor stands in need of his services to assist in her support." Shepherd quickly replied that Frank would depart for New Orleans on or about March 15, 1832. He kept his word and on April 11, 1832, McDonogh reported Frank's arrival and his placement in a hardware store.<sup>45</sup>

Gertrude Peña was a more intelligent and spirited child than her brother. Shepherd was highly pleased with her lovable disposition and commented on the ease with which she made friends.

<sup>42</sup> Shepherd to McDonogh, October 20, December 10, 1828; April 20, August 30, 1829, *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Shepherd to McDonogh, July 29, October 7, 1830; March 16, 1831; McDonogh to Shepherd, April 10, 1831, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Shepherd to McDonogh, August 1, September 9, 1831, *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> McDonogh to Shepherd, February 9, April 11, 1832; Shepherd to McDonogh, March 7, 1832, *ibid.* Writers have speculated on Frank or Francis Peña's relationship to McDonogh. Some believe, like the writer of an article in the New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, September 5, 1909, that he was McDonogh's godchild. Others have stated that he was an illegitimate son of McDonogh. There is not one shred of evidence for the latter.

In 1829 he suggested that she be placed in a female academy where she might be trained to be a genteel housewife. Her benefactor wanted her trained to make her own living and urged that she learn all things necessary to become a good housewife.<sup>46</sup>

The Ursuline Convent, Mount Benedict, three miles from Boston, opened its doors to the charming little girl from New Orleans. There she was supposed to learn the trade of milliner and mantuamaker. To encourage her work, her kindly friend Shepherd told Gertrude that McDonogh would set her up in business after she had completed her studies. McDonogh refused to countenance this idea:

You say that you told Gertrude when she learns her trade I would give her capital to set her up. You did wrong saying so, as soon as her education is finished and her trade learnt, she must come to work to support her mother who is very poor and takes in sewing to support herself. As the friend of her father I have done a great deal for her, and been at much expense. I shall do no more and [*sic*] that is completed.<sup>47</sup>

The Mother Superior at Mount Benedict found Gertrude worthy of more extended, more refined training and McDonogh consented that she remain. Naturally, Shepherd was pleased with this concession and also expressed approval of instruction in French, music, and drawing. At the same time he felt that this type of training, together with her slight frame, would disqualify her for a common trade. He suggested that McDonogh allow her to look after him and minister to his needs. McDonogh strenuously objected and argued firmly that a genteel education would not render her unfit to work at a trade.<sup>48</sup>

Gertrude's hopes and opportunities alike were ruined by the burning of the convent, and in some way she deeply offended McDonogh,<sup>49</sup> who never quite forgave her. He accepted without protest Shepherd's resolve to send her back to New Orleans in October, 1834. The tearful, depressed girl left Boston in the middle

<sup>46</sup> Shepherd to McDonogh, December 10, 1828; August 30, 1829; March 16, 1831; McDonogh to Shepherd, April 10, 1831, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>47</sup> Shepherd to McDonogh, April 30, 1832; McDonogh to Shepherd, August 8, 1832, *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> McDonogh to Shepherd, November 21, 1832; April 14, 1833; Shepherd to McDonogh, February 10, 1833, *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> McDonogh to Shepherd, August 27, 1833, *ibid.* "You are right I have no doubt on reflection, as relates to Gertrude and me, previous to my having consented, I certainly would not have given up:—my only consolation now is (as I have promised the Superior, and know in this life nothing before my word,) that I am not the only man since our father Adam, who has been deceived by a woman:—with all our pride of superiority, they, manage us as they please after all." *Ibid.*



of October and reached New Orleans a month later. Writing to Sheperd on November 13, 1834, McDonogh declared that she had almost no knowledge of music and none at all of French. Bitter drops were added to Gertrude's full cup of sorrows when her worthless brother attempted to molest or to blackmail her in 1836.<sup>50</sup>

Probably against McDonogh's will she married in 1842 and departed for France in June of that year. She had written several letters to McDonogh, begging forgiveness, but he had refused to answer her. On December 8, 1845, she made one last, futile plea, hoping to melt his heart: "If I have in any way merated [*sic*] your indignation my dear God-father permit me once more to solicit your forgiveness. I entreat you to forget the past, as to myself whatever you decide I shall never cease to love and venerate your memory. I have had a great many tears in writing to you these few lines."<sup>51</sup>

McDonogh's educational philanthropies in behalf of various white orphaned children clearly had not produced the high results which he had contemplated, but, ironically enough, considering his belief in white superiority, his efforts in educating three Negro youths produced excellent results. The first of these Negro boys sent to college by McDonogh was Thomas McDonogh Durnford, son of Andrew Durnford, free colored planter, and godson of McDonogh.<sup>52</sup>

Thomas was an alert, ambitious boy who favorably impressed his teachers at Lafayette College, Easton, Pennsylvania, as "up-right, honest, correct in his moral deportment, & high in the confidence of all who know him."<sup>53</sup> In his studies Thomas was only an average student but he played the part of gentleman scholar with graceful ease, participating in extracurricular activities and joining the exclusive Washington Literary Society at the college.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Sheperd to McDonogh, October 14, 1834; March 1, 1836; McDonogh to Sheperd, November 13, 1834, *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Mrs. Gertrude Leanthem to McDonogh, December 8, 1845, *ibid.* This hardness of heart and unforgiving attitude on the part of McDonogh contrasted strangely with his lectures on mercy and forgiveness to his sisters. Relying on fiction instead of fact, a writer in the New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, August 10, 1873, stated that McDonogh gave Gertrude a large sum of money as a wedding present. It had cost McDonogh more than \$1,100 to educate Gertrude. See itemized expense account for Gertrude Peña, December 31, 1831, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>52</sup> Deano, "Educational Interests of John McDonogh," 43; Thomas Durnford to McDonogh, January 5, 1842; Andrew Durnford to McDonogh, February 18, n. d., McDonogh Papers.

<sup>53</sup> Dr. George Junkin to McDonogh, January 25, 1845, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*; Theodore E. Norton, librarian, Lafayette College, to Helmer Webb, librarian, Tulane University, May 9, 1936, *ibid.*

Most of the cost of Durnford's education was borne by McDonogh,<sup>55</sup> and to his benefactor the youth wrote several grateful letters.<sup>56</sup> Whenever his studies permitted, he would send news of his progress in school. In the spring of 1845 he wrote joyfully: "One year and six months more and the battle is won."<sup>57</sup> His optimism was justified for he eventually obtained the coveted M. D. degree<sup>58</sup> to become one of the few Negro doctors in America before the Civil War.

In the early 1830's McDonogh petitioned his state legislature for permission to educate his slaves prior to sending them to Liberia. His request was refused and as a result he determined to aid the Negroes in another way. In a letter to Mrs. McLean he declared that he had "determined to secure to them and their descendants education by other means, and in consequence sent two talented young men of seventeen and eighteen years of age (slaves and black as Africa) to the college of Lafayette, at Easton in Pennsylvania."<sup>59</sup> These two Negro youths were David Kearney McDonogh and Washington Watts McDonogh, both of whom were being groomed by their master to serve as medical and teaching missionaries in Liberia.

David and Washington had to be educated apart from the rest of the student body because of the students' objections to associating with Negro slaves.<sup>60</sup> In a letter to William Allan, Margaret J. Preston, daughter of Dr. Junkin, described the two Negro youths and their education:

"These boys were very black, of the purest African color; David lithe, graceful and handsome, with features that had scarcely a negro trace about them; and both were exceedingly well mannered. Mr. McDonogh treated them as his children. They dressed like gentlemen, both carried watches when not many students did, and had their supply of pocket-money. He wrote to them very frequently, always in French; and many a long letter of moral and religious advice they used to bring to me to read to them."<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Durnford to McDonogh, March 25, 1845; Dr. Junkin to McDonogh, September 19, 1845; McDonogh to Dr. Junkin, October 31, 1845, *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> In one of his letters to McDonogh, Thomas Durnford declared: "It is gratifying indeed for me to be able to receive your wise counsels, counsels which possess all what is righteous all what is virtuous and good, for my welfare both on earth [*sic*] and on High." Durnford to McDonogh, January 5, 1842, *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Durnford to McDonogh, March 24, 1845, *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Norton to Webb, May 9, 1936, *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> McDonogh to Mrs. McLean, May 6, 1844, *ibid.*, quoted in Edwards (ed.), *Some Interesting Papers of John McDonogh*, 78.

<sup>60</sup> Deano, "Educational Interests of John McDonogh," 39-40; Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 52.

<sup>61</sup> Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 52.

David was superior to Washington in scholarship, averaging in the eighties, and applied himself so diligently that his health suffered.<sup>62</sup> However, he was arrogant and behaved badly toward Washington, refusing to tutor him as he had promised to do. McDonogh had believed that David was aiding Washington but the latter, when in Liberia, declared otherwise. The only reason why he had not told McDonogh before was that he feared reprisals from David.<sup>63</sup> David never did go to Liberia; instead, he attended the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York and became a well-to-do surgeon.<sup>64</sup>

McDonogh's slaves all received religious instruction and training in some trade or phase of plantation or domestic work. Many of them were also taught to read and write by some means never clearly revealed by their master. William Allan, without offering any proof, declared: "As already stated, he provided a school for the [slave] children. For years he established in his own house a teacher, whose duty it was to instruct them."<sup>65</sup>

If McDonogh did provide this formal schooling for his Negroes, he violated the laws of his state.<sup>66</sup> The available evidence seems to indicate that McDonogh did not openly defy the law, but taught a few of his slaves himself. These more intelligent blacks probably taught fundamentals of reading and writing to their fellows. McDonogh's memorials to the legislature, asking

<sup>62</sup> McDonogh to John M. Lowrie, January, n. d., 1840; W. W. Catuly to McDonogh, September 17, 1845, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>63</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, September 5, 1842, *ibid.* Thomas Durnford also disliked David. "I am sorry to say," he wrote in 1845, "that his pride will lead him to no good end—he has not that noble spirit of pride, but arrogance and effrontery. I pity David much more on this account. He wrote some very abusive letters to an aged woman of color here. It is derogatory to his standing as a pretended [*sic*] scholar and Christian. He needs a reforming and that before he gets older. His career will not ensure him success, wherever his lot may be cast." Durnford to McDonogh, March 24, 1845, *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Deano, "Educational Interests of John McDonogh," 43; Norton to Webb, May 9, 1936, McDonogh Papers; Childs, *John McDonogh*, 200. McDonogh apparently never reconciled himself to David's remaining in America. This is seen in a rather significant letter written to Walter Lowrie in 1844. He had received a letter from David and its contents had excited his "wonder and astonishment," for David had told him that he had decided not to go to Liberia. Lowrie was asked to see David and to learn his final decision. If he still refused to join McDonogh's other freed Negroes in Africa, his schooling was to be stopped. On the other hand, if he intended to keep the promises he had made to McDonogh before leaving New Orleans, he was to be allowed to graduate. Power to manumit David had been given to Lowrie but the latter was to keep this secret so that David would still believe that McDonogh could bring him back into slavery; this might alarm him into keeping his promise "to dedicate his life to the service of his Lord and Master in Africa." David's letter so displeased McDonogh that he remarked to Lowrie: "I do not know whether I shall ever write him again." At the end of his letter he referred to David as "one who . . . (appears at least,) so unprincipled, and lost to all feelings which constitute the man of worth." McDonogh to Lowrie, April 16, 1844, Duke University Collection of McDonogh Papers.

<sup>65</sup> Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 51. Both Fulson and Deano have accepted this as true. See Fulson, "Some Studies in the Life of John McDonogh," 78; Deano, "Educational Interests of John McDonogh," 39.

<sup>66</sup> Meinrad Greiner (ed.), *Louisiana Digest* (New Orleans, 1841), I, 521. "All persons who shall teach, or permit or cause to be taught, any slave in this state, to read or write, shall, on conviction thereof, before any court of competent jurisdiction be imprisoned not less than one month nor more than twelve months." *Ibid.* Such restrictive laws were rarely enforced rigidly in the South.



permission to educate his slaves, were always rejected, but they brought widespread publicity to him.<sup>67</sup> To the Reverend William McKenney he wrote: "'Our Legislature is now in session, but the Memorial, (praying permission to Educate my people, laid on the table, last year, by vote,) is permitted to sleep where it lays, not a single member being willing to risk his popularity in bringing it forward.'"<sup>68</sup>

In 1835, McDonogh anonymously circulated pamphlets advocating religious instruction for slaves. The aroused legislators denounced the activity and one of them even urged that a \$500 reward be posted to secure the identity of the sender.<sup>69</sup>

In the memoranda to his will, McDonogh recommended that the legislature again be urged to legalize the education of slaves. If such permission could be obtained, the executors of his estate were to hire teachers for the purpose and employ pious overseers who would give them religious instruction and lead them in daily prayers. Churches were to be erected on all of his plantations so that every black could devote most of Sunday to the worship of God.<sup>70</sup>

Because of his activities as an educator, McDonogh has won the admiration of many writers. One has even gone so far as to develop the thesis that "he was really an educator, or a school-master misdirected into business."<sup>71</sup> Perhaps under different circumstances and in another city, he might have become a teacher or a clergyman—one can only conjecture on this point. He was successful in some respects as a teacher, and education held a sacred place in his heart, but he was primarily a capitalist devoted to the accumulation of wealth.

The economic motivation was rarely apparent in McDonogh's educational activities, but in his scientific or technological dabblings the personal profit motive could often be found. Sometimes he was interested in better, more efficient manufacturing processes, as in brick making or sugar production. At other times he

<sup>67</sup> James E. Mount to McDonogh, February 6, 1834; McDonogh to Cresson, February 26 [?], 1835; McDonogh to Mrs. McLean, May 6, 1844, McDonogh Papers. Baltimore *American and Commercial Advertiser*, February 8, 1834; McDonogh to Reverend William McKenney, February 16, 1835, quoted in William D. Hoyt, Jr., "John McDonogh and Maryland Colonization in Liberia, 1834-35," reprinted from the *Journal of Negro History* (Washington), XXIV (October, 1939), 446. This pamphlet was located for the author by the staff of the Maryland Room of the Enoch Pratt Library, Baltimore, Maryland.

<sup>68</sup> Hoyt, "John McDonogh and Maryland Colonization in Liberia, 1834-35," *Journal of Negro History*, XXIV (October, 1939), 446.

<sup>69</sup> McDonogh to Reverend Jones, May 11, 1835, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>70</sup> Will and Memoranda of McDonogh, File #4257 (Civil Court House, New Orleans), 66.

<sup>71</sup> Deano, "Educational Interests of John McDonogh," 78, 96.

studied transportation machinery, either for ferry service or as a means of bringing added prosperity to Louisiana, thus raising the value of his lands. He found time to examine building materials, paints, and chemicals in his quest for cheaper construction and maintenance costs. Improved farm machinery also caught his eye. During his many attacks of illness he thought about medicine, disease, and the causes of epidemics.

Some of his ideas on science and technology were far in advance of his own day, but for the most part he was a typical early nineteenth-century individual, reflecting the primitive character of the scientific knowledge of his own era. This was particularly true in medicine, in which field his ideas followed the humoral theory of Dr. Benjamin Rush, famous Philadelphia physician and father of American psychiatry. The effect of climate on health was explained by McDonogh in terms of "humors": "That perspiration which [in a hot climate] expelled the humours through the outward pores, is stopped [in anyone who leads an inactive life in a cold climate], and they are thrown in on the system to find other channels to go off by, and disease is consequently induced."<sup>72</sup>

None of the epidemics of yellow fever or cholera which swept New Orleans ever suggested to his mind any modern preventative methods or the true carriers of the dreaded plagues. He accepted the theories prevalent at that time and believed with his fellows that stagnant water, filth, stench of decaying matter, weather, and freshly turned earth might singly or combined be responsible. Some of his purchases of lime might have been made for "purifying" his grounds during epidemics. Like most of his neighbors, he probably burned barrels of tar to ward off "miasmas" supposed to be responsible for yellow fever.

Except in dire emergencies he served as an amateur physician for his slaves, recommending liberal doses of purgative for many of their ills. He tried to maintain their health by lodging them in clean, well-ventilated cabins, clothing them warmly in cold weather, and feeding them vegetables with their grain and meat.

On the question of exercise, his viewpoint was modern, for he recognized its value as an aid to good health. To Lowrie he

<sup>72</sup> McDonogh to Lowrie, January, n. d., 1840, McDonogh Papers.

wrote: "Exercise of the body, and labor, especially to those who have been accustomed to it; is necessary to the enjoyment of health.—Mental vigor cannot exist without bodily health."<sup>73</sup>

Practical good sense was a salient feature of McDonogh's activity in building construction and maintenance. His criteria were solidity and durability, protection against fire and rot, and lessened costs for upkeep. Most of the bricks used in his stores, warehouses, and hotels came from his own brickyard in McDonoghville, and his own slaves did a large part of the construction work. Sometimes he acted as his own architect, making plans and drawing up specifications. Wherever possible he used brass, lead, and copper because, while their initial cost was high, they lasted longer without expensive repairs. For the sills and steps of his buildings, he usually bought granite rather than soft, fast-wearing marble.<sup>74</sup>

Insurance premiums and repairs are always two major items in the expense of large-scale landlords, and McDonogh had his share of both. To cut down these necessary costs he built in brick wherever possible and chose his paints with great care, buying the finest raw materials, including colors, and supervising his slaves in mixing of batches of paint.<sup>75</sup>

Those who had inventions or improved products to offer were apt to approach McDonogh as a prospective buyer and partner in developing a market for their machines or products. Waldien Beach of Philadelphia invented a self-loading cart and excavator that was powered by draught animals. McDonogh became interested in the device and inquired about franchise rights. John P. Owens, Beach's lawyer, offered an exclusive franchise in Louisiana for \$5,000. Charles Shelton in 1848 offered to allow McDonogh an opportunity to experiment with a paint that allegedly rendered wood both fireproof and waterproof.<sup>76</sup>

Any improvement in transportation or communication was quickly noticed by McDonogh. His comments on these matters would bring a smile to the lips of a present-day man in the streets.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> See Shepherd to McDonogh, August 30, 1829; McDonogh to Caleb D. Jordan, July 13, 1830; receipt for cash paid for firebricks. See F. P. Beck to McDonogh, November 6, 1844, *ibid.*, for typical notes on McDonogh's purchases of building materials.

<sup>75</sup> Receipts for white lead, May 18, 1839, August 12, 1844; receipt for paint color, August 16, 1839, *ibid.*, are examples of paint material purchases.

<sup>76</sup> John P. Owens to McDonogh, November 25, 1829; Charles Shelton to McDonogh, October 7, 1848, *ibid.*



On December 16, 1829, McDonogh wrote enthusiastically about the great advance made in rapidity of communication: "I have seen the message of the President received here, in the unprecedented space of time of five days and a half from Washington:— we certainly live in the era of wonders."<sup>77</sup>

Perhaps McDonogh was more justified in his enthusiasm than the twentieth-century man would be willing to admit. Technological changes were crowding on the scene during his lifetime and he himself had seen the almost miraculous application of steam as motive power in factories and in transportation. He might have been one of the curious throng of people who crowded the levee on January 12, 1812, to witness the arrival of the *New Orleans*, the first steamboat to float on the lower Mississippi.<sup>78</sup>

The possibilities of steamboats were readily seen by McDonogh and for most of his life, after he had seen the *New Orleans* in action, he was interested in navigation by steam power. He sent inquiries to J. B. Prevost of New York as early as 1815, apparently desirous of securing a monopoly for steamboat travel, between New Orleans and Natchez, from the Livingston-Fulton interests. He bought nothing at that time, but in the 1820's he contemplated the establishment of a ferry service between New Orleans and the right bank of the river. John C. Langdon of New York offered to build two ferrys for \$3,500 each and promised that the engines would not consume more than one-half cord of wood for every twelve hours of operation. Although he rejected this offer, he was still planning a ferry service in 1828. To Kohn of New York he wrote, asking for detailed information about the ferrys operating on the Hudson, "having in view the Establishment of two or three boats here, as a Ferry."<sup>79</sup>

In the 1830's McDonogh financed Joseph L. Detiste in the purchase of a steam ferry, the *Gondola*, taking a mortgage on the boat in order to secure his loan. He even took out a \$5,000 fire insurance policy on the vessel in 1837. The project ended in failure for Detiste and McDonogh proposed to sell it, advertising for that

<sup>77</sup> McDonogh to Edward D. White, December 16, 1829, *ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Grace King and John R. Ficklen, *A History of Louisiana* (4th ed., New Orleans, 1900), 171.

<sup>79</sup> J. B. Prevost to McDonogh, September 10, 1815; John C. Langdon to McDonogh, December 18, 1826; McDonogh to Kohn, November 14, 1828, *ibid.* Steamboats increased so rapidly on the Mississippi that by the late 1820's a flourishing business could be made by supplying cord wood to passing vessels. See McDonogh to Pierre Le Bourgeois, November 3, 1828, *ibid.*

purpose in the *Commercial Bulletin*.<sup>80</sup> This failure did not kill McDonogh's interest in steam navigation for as late as 1844 he was offering to lease a hotel to anyone who would establish a ferry service between McDonoghville and New Orleans.<sup>81</sup>

McDonogh was a friend of railroad development, too, and might have been one of the few far-sighted New Orleans businessmen who realized the significance of railroads in the rivalry for control of the trade and markets of the Upper Mississippi Valley.<sup>82</sup> In 1835 and 1836 he was one of the directors of the New Orleans and Nashville Railroad Company. In 1837 he granted a right of way and a depot to a railroad company planning to run a line through McDonoghville.<sup>83</sup>

Canals came within the scope of McDonogh's study during the canal building craze in the United States. Whenever he discussed the subject of canals with his congressmen, he was careful to point out military as well as commercial advantages that would accrue from the improvements. In 1819 he wrote a letter to Representative Henry Johnson, in which he proposed two new canals. "One is about five miles from the City . . . on the left bank of the Mississippi, to commence on the river and extend through the plantation of Governor Villere, a distance of three or four miles on a straight line, to communicate with the Bayou Bienvenu." The other "'should commence on the right bank . . . immediately in front of the City . . . and, extending back about six miles, communicate with the Bayou Villar.'" <sup>84</sup>

Closely connected with the river was another problem that McDonogh studied with a thoroughness worthy of its importance—this was the threat of floods. After extensive reading, even in foreign language journals, he sent a remarkable memorial to the legislature. In this paper he pointed out that General Andre-

<sup>80</sup> McDonogh to Thomas Phoebe, April 26, 1836; insurance policy issued by the Atlantic Marine and Fire Insurance Company of New Orleans, April 10, 1837; G. W. & T. M. Northam to McDonogh, August 30, 1837; McDonogh to G. W. & T. M. Northam, September 21, 1837, McDonogh Papers; Kane, "John McDonogh: Land Speculator," 5.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas W. Thompson to McDonogh, April 15, 1844, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>82</sup> New Orleans's failure to push railroad developments linking the port with the upper valley was one of the chief reasons why, in spite of its strategic location, the city lost out in the rivalry with the eastern seaboard for the prize of the Midwest. The Erie Canal, the railroads linking the upper valley with the eastern coast, high insurance rates, lack of capital, the vagaries of the river, and the climate were other factors that tipped the scales against New Orleans. One of the best analyses of the reasons for New Orleans's failure is found in Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union*, 2 vols. (New York, 1947), II, 212, 214, 218-20, 222-24, 226-27.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Sarpy to McDonogh, June 26, 1835; Celeste Beale to McDonogh, April 10, 1836; Record of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the New Orleans and Nashville Railroad, June 7, 1836; G. B. Milligan to McDonogh, March 28, 1837; McDonogh to Milligan, March 30, 1837, McDonogh Papers. In 1836 he reluctantly refused to subscribe to the proposed Baton Rouge and Clinton Railroad Company because of his heavy financial obligations. See A. N. Ogden to McDonogh, October 28, 1836; McDonogh to Ogden, November 4, 1836, *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> McDonogh to Johnson, January 14, 1819, quoted in Childs, *John McDonogh*, 184, 186.

ossi, in his treatise on the Canal of Languedoc, had explained clearly the cause of floods. As long as the forests remained uncut and the land uncultivated, excess waters drained but slowly into the main streams; hence, floods were infrequent. Removal of trees and grass led to rapid draining of water into the streams and this in turn was the chief cause for the increasing severity of floods.<sup>85</sup>

Since the upper valley would continue to be stripped of timber and be cultivated, the only solution that would protect New Orleans from a disastrous flood, such as had just occurred after the McCarty crevasse, was the construction of a spillway or "an outlet in a different direction to the mother stream, to a part of her waters, and by that means tending to keep them low and hinder them from overflowing in the principal bed." This spillway should be located at the Bonnet Carré Bend "twelve leagues above the city."<sup>86</sup>

At this point Lake Pontchartrain was nearest the river and the fall between the river and the lake was equivalent to the fall between New Orleans and the Gulf, a distance more than thirty times as great. "By a Hydraulick calculation" the water would flow through the spillway and keep the river below flood level. A chartered company could build restraining levees on both sides of the outlet, which should be as wide as the river at that point. Only the larger trees need be cut for once the water rushed through, it would dig its own bed. To pay for the project, tolls could be charged to vessels using the channel during the river's flood stage. He prayed that a company be chartered to begin the work as soon as possible. A legislative committee reported favorably on his plan and urged appointment of McDonogh and two engineers to make a more thorough study.<sup>87</sup> In spite of the soundness of this plan, it was finally dropped and the state had to wait over a hundred years for the spillway.

The breadth of McDonogh's technological interests is only partly revealed by his study of floods and spillways; he was also a manufacturer on a minor scale. In the Amite area he had two sawmills, one operated by steam power, and both were in operation in 1810. Only a year later, however, he had abandoned them,<sup>88</sup> finding it cheaper to buy his building material from others.

<sup>85</sup> New Orleans Louisiana Gazette and Mercantile Advertiser, May 17, 1816.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Joseph Thomas to McDonogh, September 25, 1810; McDonogh to Thomas, May 1, 1811, McDonogh Papers.



A larger industry operated by McDonogh was a brickyard in McDonoghville. This establishment fronted the levee for six hundred feet and had a thousand feet of batture. There were blacksmith shops, carpenter shops, office buildings, sand pits and lodgings for a hundred slaves. Its capacity totaled many thousands of bricks weekly. After operating it for ten years or more, McDonogh decided to sell. He offered the entire establishment to the Company of Architects of New Orleans in 1829, setting his price at \$60,000 to \$70,000. The company informed him that it was not authorized to buy lands outside the city. McDonogh then cut his price to \$45,000 which was to be paid in buildings erected on some of his lots in New Orleans.<sup>89</sup> This clever speculation does not seem to have materialized.

The third type of industry to which McDonogh devoted some of his time was sugar milling, and in this field he might have obtained valuable advice from Valcour Aime and Julien Poydras. His specifications for sugar mill machinery and boiling kettles were detailed, nor was he satisfied with undue variations from his figures. His chief supplier was Anthony Beelen of Pittsburgh who shipped considerable amounts of machinery to him in the three years before the Battle of New Orleans.<sup>90</sup> After 1815 McDonogh gave little thought to milling of sugar.

From the discussion of McDonogh's many activities, one might be tempted to assume that his life was always marked by serious pursuits or that his character never had a gay, sociable side. Actually, McDonogh had experienced many of the social delights of New Orleans, and from 1804 to 1816 was regarded by many of his contemporaries as a *bon vivant* and one of the most fashionable bachelors of the city. This facet of his career and the legends which grew out of it make the most fascinating of all the studies of his life.

The education of young people was a life-long, abiding interest of McDonogh, and out of that interest grew the scheme of educational philanthropy that has brought him lasting fame. His parents instilled in him a deep respect for education as a means of social and economic betterment, constantly impressing upon his mind the fact that moral guidance should be an integral part of

<sup>89</sup> Kane, "John McDonogh: Land Speculator," 18-19; McDonogh to the President and Company of Architects, April 11, April 28, 1829, McDonogh Papers. Even while he was attempting to sell his brickyard, an inventor asked him to examine a new type brick kiln and brick press. See L. [?] R. Bakewell to McDonogh, April 10, 1829, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>90</sup> McDonogh to Anthony Beelen, March 21, 1814; Beelen to McDonogh, May 3, 1814, McDonogh Papers.

intellectual training. From his own experience he hammered out a set of educational principles that were subjected to the test of actual practice, either on his brothers, or on orphaned children, or on slaves. His theories of female education were somewhat conservative, but his ideas on education of boys were in conformity with the best of modern practice.

Education should be adapted to the student and should be a dynamic part of his living experience, rather than a sterile exercise of mental faculties totally divorced from reality. The educative process involved training for the body as well as for the mind, hence part of the school period should be spent out-of-doors in exercise or productive labor. In general, every boy and girl should receive a semivocational education.

As a teacher he was not successful in moulding his brothers after his heart's desire, but in devoting time and money to their education he proved again that he was no miser and that he was not devoid of love for his kindred. This was especially true of his efforts to educate Peggy and the children of one of his sisters. In providing for the education of six or more orphans, he demonstrated the most lovable and compassionate side of his character.

In the education of his slaves he displayed not only a keen insight into the character of the Negro, but also a stubborn courage that defied social customs of his day. Even though he knew it was illegal and was fully aware that his neighbors would be offended, he provided an excellent religious, vocational, and intellectual training for his slaves. Perhaps his motives were not altogether altruistic. Educated, pious slaves would be more docile, honest, and efficient laborers, and in their gratitude he could find a satisfying measure of personal security, of freedom from fear of servile rebellion. His trained Negroes could be employed as clerks, rent collectors, messengers, overseers, and skilled craftsmen, thus saving hundreds of dollars in salaries that would otherwise have to be paid to others. In addition, these Christianized blacks represented both souls brought into God's fold and devout agents for the spread of the Gospel in Africa.

Except in his emphasis on the value of exercise and his theories of flood control, McDonogh was not in advance of the scientific-technological ideas of his era. He did show a lively interest in inventions, particularly those associated with trans-

portation or communication, sometimes seeking franchises for a particular machine. Canals were peculiarly suitable to Louisiana, according to his belief, because of the extensive system of bayous and the swampy nature of most of the land. He saw that steamboats would become masters of the Mississippi and that the days of sailing vessels were numbered.

With the advent of the steam locomotive, he became a proponent of railroad development. He was a director in one company and was financially interested in a second. Although he left no papers dealing with the importance of railroads in the rivalry between New Orleans and the east for the trade of the Upper Mississippi Valley, he might have been one of the few who saw that New Orleans was falling behind its rivals because of its failure to push railroad development.

McDonogh displayed considerable skill as an amateur engineer and architect. His chief triumph in engineering was the formulation of a spillway plan to protect New Orleans from floods. He placed the site of his proposed spillway almost exactly where modern engineers finally built it over one hundred years later. As an architect he personally supervised construction of a number of brick edifices and chose materials that were durable and easy to keep in repair. He was primarily concerned with maintenance costs, and lower insurance premiums, rather than beauty.

Manufacturing did not prove a permanent attraction to him, nonetheless in his technological interests he displayed that intellectual curiosity which is the mark of a superior mind. One must conclude that McDonogh, in many respects, was an intellectual and idealist in spite of the materialism evident in his financial operations.

## CHAPTER V

### THE BON VIVANT AND MAN OF LEGEND

Research at its best is a constructive process designed to separate fact from fiction, to assemble the disjointed fragments of the past, and to reveal that past in all its warm, living reality. From this point of view the historian and the novelist are not so widely separated as has been thought. Both seek to make the past live once more; they differ chiefly in the manner in which they



accomplish their objective. The historian must bound his imagination within the frame-work of his facts, whereas the novelist may allow free play to his fancy, striving, if he is sincere, to be truthful, yet feeling free to fill in gaps in the record and to enliven his account with dialogues that might have taken place and with reconstructions of social activities common to the period of which he is writing.

There is need for much debunking when one deals with the McDonogh legends, yet the process can be constructive because certain legends are cleared of the taint of fiction and are shown to be actual fact. An example of this is the legend of McDonogh's military service in the War of 1812 which was documented by records from the War Department.

Most of the McDonogh legends were in full bloom before the eccentric philanthropist died, and one of the earliest of these stories concerned his brief, dazzling career in the social lime-light of New Orleans. Childs has given the legend in its clearest, most compact form:

In his early life, John McDonogh was one of the nabobs of the city. He lived the life of a man of the social world, seeking and indulging in fashionable affairs and dissipations of the élite. It is even said he was considered the handsomest man in the colony. His attire and elegant tastes seemed to be modeled after the style and fashion of the dandies of the Regency. He possessed one of the most select and luxuriously furnished mansions on Chartres Street, in the bon ton section of the gay City of New Orleans. Here he kept the finest horses and carriages and a cellar of the rarest and costliest wines. At his entertainments, which were frequent, he always had the best that money could procure, and all his social activities were conducted on a scale of great extravagance and exclusiveness. Thus, during this period of his life, his fashions and habits conformed to his social position and wealth. He moved in New Orleans' most exclusive society and was considered a contemporary of Beau Brummel.<sup>1</sup>

Was McDonogh ever a gay social figure? After several years of research on this problem, the author believes that the legend is essentially true, although the direct evidence to support the

<sup>1</sup> Childs, *John McDonogh*, 11-12. For a few of the many accounts of McDonogh as a *bon vivant*, see *Baltimore American*, December 11, 1904; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, December 29, 1898; Walker, "John McDonogh the Millionaire," *Continental Monthly*, II (August, 1862), 170-71. Atherton did not believe that McDonogh was actually fond of society. See Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History*, VIII (November, 1941), 455.

story is quite scant. Most of the evidence available is of a circumstantial nature. For example, a careful study of the hundreds of personal purchases made by McDonogh in the years between 1806 and 1816 permits the deduction that he was living in comparative luxury. That he was entertaining numerous guests can be gathered from the large quantities of liquor, tea, coffee, sugar, and food bought by him at frequent intervals. Only evening festivities could have led to the heavy consumption of candles indicated by his purchases.<sup>2</sup>

Much has been said about McDonogh's large corps of domestic servants, his horses, and his handsome, expensive carriages. That he did have several black servants at his residence can be proved by the taxes paid for them and by bills for medical services rendered. Among the McDonogh Papers are letters touching on the cost and specifications of carriages purchased in Philadelphia. Tax receipts for use of these vehicles are also available. There is added proof that he had at least one black coachman and a stable of two or more horses. All of these facts indicate that McDonogh was enjoying a fashionable social life prior to his removal across the river.

Nearly every writer who has accepted the portrayal of young McDonogh as a *bon vivant* has stated that he had a luxurious mansion at the corner of Chartres and Toulouse streets.<sup>3</sup> In all probability McDonogh owned the two-story brick building where Victor's Cafe is now located, but that he lived there at any time prior to 1814 is quite unlikely. None of the city directories before 1811 listed McDonogh's residence, so the exact location of his house must remain a mystery. As early as 1803 he was living in the faubourg St. Mary, according to the recollections of a man who knew him.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A small sampling of receipts shows the following purchases: October 2, 1809, four boxes of candles, one barrel of pork, and one barrel of beef; February 16, 1810, one box of tea, one case of wine, and \$4 worth of port wine; April 17, 1810, one box of soap, \$17.50 worth of coffee, six gallons of brandy, and six gallons of whisky. These receipts are a part of the Duke University Collection of McDonogh Papers; many others are in Tulane University's collection of McDonogh Papers. Sometimes it is difficult to tell whether McDonogh purchased goods for his own use, or for his friends or for his slaves. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, one might assume that articles of fine quality were for his personal use.

<sup>3</sup> Chartres Street, according to visitors in ante-bellum New Orleans, was one of the most fashionable thoroughfares in the city. Robert E. Hewes, "The Miser of Algiers," *Southerner*, I (March, 1920), 41, and Kendall, "New Orleans' Miser Philanthropist," *New Orleans Roosevelt Review* (July, 1943), 12, are two of the accounts which locate McDonogh's residence at the corner of Chartres and Toulouse. Cable (ed.), *Historical Sketch Book and Guide to New Orleans*, 303, located the residence more specifically "at the northwest corner of Chartres and Toulouse streets."

<sup>4</sup> *New Orleans Daily Orleanian*, November 13, 1850. "He maintained a handsome domestic establishment for a bachelor, entertained liberally himself, and partook in return of the social hospitalities of his friends." *Ibid.* Fulson, "Some Studies in the Life of John McDonogh," 28, stated that he lived at the corner of Magazine and Poydras until 1809, at which date he moved to the residence at Chartres and Toulouse.

He moved from his first residence some time in 1809, for in that year a newspaper advertisement by William Donaldson referred to "the house lately occupied by Mr. M'Donough, in the Suburb St. Mary."<sup>5</sup> Miss Fulson found a reference to McDonogh's residence at 58 North Dauphine in Whitney's *New Orleans Register* for 1811. That he was living there in 1811 is corroborated by a letter from William Simpson in July of that year.<sup>6</sup> The following year, however, he seemed to be residing in the American section of town once more.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps he moved for a third time, if a receipt dated December 13, 1813, is proof that he was then living on Hospital Street.<sup>8</sup>

McDonogh might have lived at the corner of Chartres and Toulouse between 1813 and 1816, but there is no evidence to support this belief. The only definite thing that can be said about the location of his residence is that he did *not* own a home in the French section of town before 1810. Mr. Charles L. Thompson, a New Orleans book dealer and collector, told the author that McDonogh could not have entertained luxuriously at the Chartres Street address because the ground floor of the building was used as a hardware store in those days.<sup>9</sup> At first glance it is difficult to reconcile McDonogh's Puritanical cast of thought with his social activities as a young man, but there is an explanation. He started out by using social connections as a means of improving his business—attending and giving parties brought him into contact with officials and men of wealth. As a respected friend of the social élite, he had a competitive advantage in business which played an important part in his financial success. Before long the gay whirl of entertainments acted as an intoxicant on his pleasure-starved mind and captured him, as it had done so many others.

Together with his good friend Alexander Milne, another eccentric Scot who devoted his fortune to charity, McDonogh was a guest at the most fashionable homes and had his box at the theater. Both men were supposed to have attended the lavish

<sup>5</sup> New Orleans *Louisiana Courier*, March 17, 1809.

<sup>6</sup> Fulson, "Some Studies in the Life of John McDonogh," 28; Simpson to McDonogh, July 17, 1811, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>7</sup> Receipt for medical services, 1813, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers. In part the receipt said: "for medical attendance to himself and different Domestic in the Course of last year since April 11th. when living in the Fauxbourg St. Mary." *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Receipt for three months' rent of a house on Hospital Street, December 6, 1813, McDonogh Papers. All of these receipts seem to show that McDonogh was capriciously moving about town, never remaining long in one place. Perhaps the actual truth is that McDonogh rented or owned several houses at the same time and lived part of the year in each. It is quite possible, too, that some of the houses rented by him were occupied by mistresses.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mr. Charles L. Thompson, September 15, 1949.



parties given by Madame Delphine Laulaurie, the beautiful sadist whose secret torturing of slaves created a sensation when New Orleans learned the grim truth.<sup>10</sup>

Some writers believe that McDonogh made social-business connections that he desired to forget. One of these, according to legend, was with the Lafitte brothers who allegedly sold a fortune in stolen goods through the firm of John McDonogh Jr. and Company. There is no evidence to support this legend, yet a New Orleans writer has gone so far as to portray McDonogh as the secretary of the pirates.<sup>11</sup> Only one small bit of information on smuggling has been found in the McDonogh Papers. In 1814 McDonogh wrote a letter in behalf of an accused smuggler but did not succeed in freeing the man.<sup>12</sup>

One morning in 1817 the city awoke to make a startling discovery—that rich young bachelor, McDonogh, had moved to his plantation across the river. Those who knew McDonogh were stunned by this seemingly abrupt decision. It was unthinkable! Why should a man blessed with wealth, a fine home, and the admiration of beautiful women suddenly give up everything and withdraw from society? A host of fascinating legends grew up around this event, yet the answer is still being sought almost 133 years later.

McDonogh had indeed sold his city residences and moved to McDonoghville, taking his costly furniture with him. However, his decision to move was a gradual one; it had begun to take shape as early as 1815, when McDonoghville became entirely his. Everything had long since been in readiness and the plantation buildings were fit for occupancy by 1816.<sup>13</sup> Growing debts and a desire to manage his estate more efficiently were the reasons for his moving, according to some of the more reliable McDonogh biographers.<sup>14</sup>

The economy motive is a sound one based on actual fact, even though it does not tell the whole story. On July 24, 1817, McDonogh wrote to William Taylor: "Within the last month I have removed from the city to a place I have opposite and in

<sup>10</sup> Castellanos, *New Orleans as It Was*, 60-61.

<sup>11</sup> Andre Cajun [a pen name], "Tontoe, King of Silver Street," *New Orleans Illustrated Press*, August 25, September 1, 8, 1949.

<sup>12</sup> Edwin Louvain to P. C. B. Dupless [?], September 29, 1814, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>13</sup> During the disastrous flood of 1816, Mayor August McCarty publicly announced that refugees could find sanctuary on McDonogh's plantation. *New Orleans Louisiana Gazette and Mercantile Advertiser*, May 15, 1816.

<sup>14</sup> Kane, "John McDonogh: Land Speculator," 13-14; Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 33.

front of it on the right bank of the river, where in a small box I employ myself in gardening, making wood, etc., etc. This I have been obliged to do for the sake of economy until I can relieve myself of my debts." Taylor felt that this might give McDonogh "leisure to look back on the scenes of past life and to contemplate the follies of the world."<sup>15</sup>

It is the author's opinion, based on careful attention to the expressed sentiments of McDonogh over the course of his life, that one of the principal reasons for his removal across the river was a profound religious awakening combined with a psychological revulsion against his past wicked ways. McDonogh had had several attacks of severe illness and had seen pleasure-loving friends perish, struck down in their youth by yellow fever. More and more he began to reflect on his father's warnings that the wages of sin were death; and who had been more sinful than he in forsaking his Calvinistic teachings, in forgetting God amid the pleasures of the flesh? Perhaps he asked himself: Am I fulfilling the Lord's commands by leading this sort of life? Is this the way to preserve my health so that I may live long enough to accumulate money for the poor?

He must have been painfully aware, as he answered these questions, that he had been untrue to his father's ideals; that he had broken away from the pious teachings of his mother. There was only one thing to do: repent and flee before it was too late. Once more he read the rules he had penned for the guidance of his life—here was the one true path to glory, fortune, and immortal life. His vow was to dedicate his life and fortune to God; this could only be done by abandoning forever the light-hearted social circles of New Orleans.

Be that as it may, the explanatory legends concerning his departure from the city merit some consideration. One of the most plausible is based on the question of his health. According to this story, Doctor Flood warned him that he could not expect to live much longer if he did not give up his dissipations. Frightened by this blunt admonition, McDonogh retired to his plantation in McDonoghville.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> McDonogh to Taylor, July 24, 1817, quoted in Childs, *John McDonogh*, 195-96. Taylor to McDonogh, August 26, 1817, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>16</sup> New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, August 10, 1873; Childs, *John McDonogh*, 12; Kendall, "New Orleans' Miser Philanthropist," *New Orleans Roosevelt Review* (July, 1943), 12, 14. McDonogh's illness was supposed to have been a severe case of piles. See New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, August 10, 1873. The health question cannot be ignored. It is known that early nineteenth-century Orleanians regarded the right bank of the river as a sanctuary in time of epidemics. See Kaiser, "Yellow Fever in Nineteenth Century New Orleans," 44. Perhaps this factor helped influence McDonogh's decision to move.

Ill health dogged McDonogh's footsteps during almost every decade of his career in Louisiana. He experienced a mild attack of fever in 1801 and more serious attacks in 1803-1804. Except for mild indispositions, he was comparatively well until 1819 when he suffered an attack of intermittent fever grave enough to worry his friend, Shepherd. I "regret extremely," the latter wrote on September 12, 1820, "that you should have postponed for a single moment a visit to these Northern States." McDonogh seemed to regain his health in 1821, but in the following year he had a lengthy illness which almost cost him his life. A number of his friends wrote to inquire about his health; even the Ursuline nuns offered prayers for his recovery.<sup>17</sup>

News of his recurrent attacks of illness encouraged doctors and quacks to offer their nostrums. One correspondent had a powder which would promote the "evacuating [of] those humours of an Acid quality." A physician offered to treat him in 1823, after learning of his maladies: "Mr. Rousseau, who[m] I have recently cured of a malady, from which one does not die but which causes terrible suffering, told me that you were at times attacked by the same malady and . . . you were desirous to know my address."<sup>18</sup>

Five years later McDonogh contracted Dengué or Spanish Fever.<sup>19</sup> However, he was more fortunate in escaping contagion during the four epidemics of yellow fever and cholera that devastated New Orleans in 1832-1833. Cholera even more than Yellow Jack or Bronze John struck terror into the hearts of the people, because of its sudden onset and virulent nature. According to the recollections of Theodore Clapp, the epidemic began on a gloomy, foreboding day in October, 1832. The superstitious looked up at the black canopy of clouds and crossed themselves; in midday it was so dark that candles had to be lighted in the offices and cafes.

Within a few days the stricken port became a city of the dead, reeking with the odor of unburied bodies and aglare with

<sup>17</sup> William Taylor to McDonogh, November 23, 1801; Shepherd to McDonogh, September 12, 1820; McDonogh to Kinder, July 25, 1822; McDonogh to J. B. Eves, August 22, 1822; Peter Agier to McDonogh, September 20, 1822, McDonogh Papers; McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, October 25, 1803, December 12, 1804, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers; Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 41; Mother François de Sales Bowllins to McDonogh, June 27, 1822, quoted in Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 41.

<sup>18</sup> R. Davis [?] to McDonogh, n. d.; Doctor Luluc to McDonogh, October 12, 1823, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>19</sup> McDonogh to Shepherd, August 20, 1828, *ibid.*



the fires from burning tar. The periodic boom of cannon mingled with funeral dirges and the lamentations of the living. Houses were padlocked with their contents of dead and dying people and large black crosses warned the wayfarer of his peril. Hundreds of bodies were cast into the river or hastily buried in private gardens. Doctors and nurses died at their posts or fled the city while corpses decayed in hospital wards. The living were unable to bury all of the dead and in some graveyards the plague victims were stacked up like cordwood.

Here was a scene from Dante's *Inferno*. The living lost hope, abandoning themselves to excesses of drinking and displaying a loud, hollow merriment. Wedding parties were decimated by the disease. Stifling heat combined with light showers to increase the slime and stench that enveloped the city. Not until a heavy rain and cool winds arrived did the terror slacken, but by that time more than 5,000 people had died.<sup>20</sup>

Other epidemics of lesser violence were also weathered by McDonogh, yet his health, as he explained to Mrs. Hannah Meredith in 1843, had been ruined by overwork and by "debilitating climate." Both in 1841 and in 1843 he suffered prolonged periods of ill health. He rallied for a time in the spring of 1845, but in the summer of that year he had fallen victim to what might have been a form of tertian malaria. Throughout 1846 his physical condition continued to deteriorate; he was now aging so rapidly that he began to wonder whether his days were numbered. Rheumatism tortured his wasted frame in 1850, at which time he spoke about his premonitions of approaching death.<sup>21</sup>

It is evident, from the foregoing account, that those who accept the legend of illness forcing McDonogh's withdrawal from social circles can find some basis for their beliefs. This cannot be said for those who adhere to the legends of disappointed love, for in the latter case no letters can be found to prove anything. The sole "proof" consists of a lady's slipper and a perfumed ribbon

<sup>20</sup> The account of the epidemic as given above was taken from Clapp, *Autobiography*, 116-41.

<sup>21</sup> McDonogh to Mrs. Meredith, April 19, 1843; McDonogh to R. N. Ogden, August 14, 1841; S. Britton Bennett to McDonogh, August 3, 1843; Mrs. Eliza Hayne to McDonogh, April 7, 1845; Andrew Durnford to McDonogh, August 1, September 4, 1845; McDonogh to General John H. Cocke, March 20, 1846; Mrs. McLean to McDonogh, December 12, 1847; McDonogh to James Wikoff, June 11, 1849; McDonogh to Reverend Gurley, June 10, 1850, McDonogh Papers; "Death of John M'Donogh," *Spirit of the Times*, XX (November, 1850), 464.

allegedly found among McDonogh's papers.<sup>22</sup> On such flimsy evidence as this various writers have produced pages of sentimental nonsense, constructing tear-provoking word pictures full of contradictions or impossible conflicts in chronology.<sup>23</sup>

The first of the romantic legends linked the name of McDonogh to that of Micaëla Almonester, red-haired, self-willed daughter of Don Andres de Almonester y Roxas, aristocratic holder of many titles, including that of "Knight of the Royal and Distinguished Order of Carlos III." The worthy Don had died three years before McDonogh arrived in New Orleans, but some writers unwittingly have resurrected him by having him alive in 1811 or 1813 so that he might play the role of villain with his haughty rejection of McDonogh's suit for his daughter's hand.

Micaëla was almost sixteen years of age when McDonogh supposedly sought her hand in marriage. He was thirty-two at the time and more than one author has rejected the legend solely because of the disparity between their ages. This objection is not sound because it was common for girls of that day to marry while still in their teens; nor was McDonogh a decrepit old man. One version of the love story blamed McDonogh's humble origin for his rejection by the girl's family. His refusal to abandon Protestantism for Roman Catholicism was the other version's explanation for the failure of his suit.

In one of the most dazzling social events of early New Orleans history, Micaëla was married to her youthful cousin, Joseph Xavier Celestino Delfau de Pontalba, October 23, 1811. The wedding took place in St. Louis Cathedral, the magnificent church built through the philanthropy of the bride's father, and was conducted by Father Antonio de Sedella, the same priest who had baptised her. Bernard de Marigny y Mandeville represented Napoleon's famed Marshal, Ney, who was asked to be one of

<sup>22</sup> Some of the works which accept one or more of the legends of McDonogh's love affairs are Elizabeth Grace King, *New Orleans, the Place and the People* (New York, 1896), 360-71; Walker, "John McDonogh the Millionaire," *Continental Monthly*, II (August, 1862), 171-72; New Orleans *Sunday States*, May 6, 1894; John S. Kendall, "New Orleans' Miser Philanthropist, John McDonogh," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XXVI (January, 1943), 144; Baltimore *American*, December 11, 1904; New Orleans *True Delta*, May 2, 1891. A few of those regarding the legends as without sufficient foundation are Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 33; "John McDonogh," *Louisiana Journal of Education*, II (May, 1880), 76; Lane C. Kendall, "John McDonogh—Slave-Owner," Pt. I, *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XV (October, 1932), 650; Fortier (ed.), *Louisiana*, 2 vols. (Atlanta, 1909), II, 110.

<sup>23</sup> Two examples of sentimental comments on the alleged love affairs have been culled from scores of newspaper articles. On May 2, 1891, the New Orleans *New Delta* remarked: "When 'Madame Pontalba laughed his love to scorn, she crushed laughter, love and the social instincts of man from his nature. From that day he hated woman with scorn and venom that was impenetrable." The Baltimore *American*, December 11, 1904, also indulged in poetic melancholy: "He was thought to possess nothing in common with human kind, but after death it was found that he 'had loved and lost' and had cherished the image of a woman all his days."

the witnesses.<sup>24</sup> The young couple soon departed for France where in time marital bliss was shattered by ugly scandals concerning Micaëla's fidelity. She barely survived a murderous attack by her enraged father-in-law and thereafter lived apart from her husband.

According to legend she returned to New Orleans in 1846 so that she might look after the development of her valuable properties around Jackson Square. She had an ambitious project for building apartment houses on St. Peter and St. Ann streets, but ran into difficulties when the Council of the First Municipality rejected her plea for a banquette in front of her proposed buildings. It seemed that her project was doomed to failure unless she could obtain some of the property in the rear, on Chartres and Jefferson (now Wilkinson) streets. McDonogh owned most of this ground, so she contrived to meet him in a lawyer's office, hoping to awaken his love and to win the desired concession from him. The meeting took place, McDonogh seemed impressed, and the Baronness went ahead with her plans.

She ordered her builder, Samuel Stewart, "to take possession and tear down some 15 or 16 feet of the property of McDonogh. She had caused an act to be drawn up, which she believed McDonogh would sign, by which he abandoned to her this amount of property. McDonogh, hearing of the projected tearing down of his property, at once applied in the Fifth District Court of New Orleans, Judge A. M. Buchanan presiding, and obtained an injunction, which resulted in Mme. de Pontalba having to pay damages and costs, besides repairing the walls which she had already pulled down."<sup>25</sup> A search of the court records has failed to reveal that any such event took place.

According to some of the romantic legends, a few years after his rejection by Micaëla, the wealthy Scot fell in love with a charm-

<sup>24</sup> All of the historical facts concerning Micaëla's birth, baptism, and marriage came from the records of St. Louis Cathedral. The interested reader might check Baptismal Register, St. Louis Cathedral, Book #2, page 409, No. 1578; Marriage Register, St. Louis Cathedral, June 12, 1806, to June 2, 1821, page 278, No. 103(B). After her marriage, according to one legend, McDonogh abandoned his social activities and became a recluse in McDonoghville.

<sup>25</sup> Cable (ed.), *Historical Sketch Book and Guide to New Orleans*, 303-304. Walker, "John McDonogh the Millionaire," *Continental Monthly*, II (August, 1862), 175, dramatically described the alleged meeting in the lawyer's office. Micaëla's beauty had long since faded away, but McDonogh was genuinely moved to see her again. She offered to marry him and he asked for time to think over the matter. Later that day he asked his lawyer what the latter would think if he married the Baronness. The lawyer replied: "I should think . . . that you had become crazy." McDonogh is supposed to have answered: "Ah! . . . And you would think right—you would think right; so let us to business."



ing young woman from Baltimore. She was intelligent, dignified, warm-hearted, healthy in a fresh, out-door girl fashion—a perfect example of the finest American womanhood. Her family name was Johnston (or Johnson, in some of the legends), and she came to New Orleans around the year 1813. Once more McDonogh offered his heart in marriage, and again the cold shadow of religious difference killed his dream. Miss Johnston was Roman Catholic—she insisted on rearing any children they might have in her faith. McDonogh's stern refusal to bow to the Church of Rome separated them forever. Miss Johnston renounced this life, entered Ursuline Convent, and became a nun.

Thirty-five years later, McDonogh learned that she was now Mother Superior at the Convent and began to pay an annual visit, bringing one red rose each New Year's eve; a pretty story, certainly, but one having slight basis and also containing an absurd conflict in chronology. Miss Johnston became a nun in 1815 and McDonogh was supposed to have made his first visit thirty-five years later. That would be December 31, 1850—by that time McDonogh had been in the grave for more than sixty days. The Johnston love story appeared in the *Sunday States* (the Sunday issue of the *Daily States*), May 6, 1894. A former pupil of the convent and the nuns protested the following week because the story cast reflections on the purity of the institution. The Mother Superior denied that any Miss Johnston had entered the convent until 1871. A reporter checked and found that a Miss Susanne Thérèse Johnston had entered on October 21, 1813, and had taken the veil two years later. However, there was no record that she ever became Mother Superior.<sup>26</sup>

The Johnston legend might have started when someone saw the girl in the company of McDonogh before she entered the convent. Conceivably it could have gotten its start from the fact that he did correspond with a Miss Maria S. Johnston of Baltimore. This Miss Johnston was a friend of his youth and rendered favors to him by looking after his sister, Jane. In 1841 or 1842

<sup>26</sup> New Orleans *Sunday States*, May 6, 13, 1894. Fulson, "Some Studies in the Life of John McDonogh," 36-37, secured from Mother St. Henry, Prioress of the Ursuline Convent in 1930, the information that a Miss Susanna Thérèse Stith Johnston had entered the Convent on October 21, 1813, and had become a nun on October 21, 1815, taking the name of Sister St. Angela.

she visited McDonogh and the sight of this woman in the company of the old "miser" must have caused a great deal of gossip in New Orleans.<sup>27</sup>

Almost from the date of his arrival in New Orleans McDonogh became an object of gossip among his friends who felt that it would be best for him if he married some deserving girl. In 1802 his father hopefully reacted to rumors that he had married and asked for information. McDonogh Senior did not reveal his disappointment when he learned the truth; nevertheless when the years passed and the son seemed to be making no effort to accomplish this important business, the worried father declared: "If you cannot find no young Leadey to pleas you in New Orlains, you may come to Baltimore and geet one both Rich and Beutifull, and I think you had better consider soon aboute it." Mrs. William Taylor decided to play the role of Cupid in the case of this reluctant bachelor and in 1810 an intimate friend of McDonogh told him that "she has picked out for you a fine girl for a wife & . . . you must come on & see her."<sup>28</sup>

McDonogh eluded every well-meant effort to end his single state; indeed, there is no evidence that he ever seriously contemplated matrimony, the romantic legends to the contrary notwithstanding. Whatever the reason or combination of reasons for his forsaking New Orleans social life, he did move to McDonoghville in 1817.<sup>29</sup> Around his life and his residence alike a host of legends have been woven, clinging to the central core of truth like massive growths of ivy on old stone walls, and presenting a difficult task for the researchers who must cut away the luxuriant green mask of fancy without damaging the structure beneath.

For example, there is the legend of his austere, friendless, gloomy life in McDonoghville, perhaps best expressed by the *Daily Delta*, October 27, 1850:

"No white person lived in the ancient and dilapidated chateau in which he resided. No person ever visited

<sup>27</sup> Miss Maria Johnston to McDonogh, July 20, 1842, McDonogh Papers. The author wishes to make it perfectly clear that he does not regard McDonogh as having been a spotless Puritan in his sex life when a young man. He was handsome, vigorous, and well-to-do; there was no one to restrain him in this city where laxity of morals among the young men was common. Undoubtedly he had several mistresses. Some New Orleans book dealers gleefully point to receipts showing that he purchased perfumes and feminine finery in the days when he was a *bon vivant*. It would be straining the imagination to believe that he did not indulge in sexual relationships. Notwithstanding this fact, there has been no evidence uncovered as yet to prove that he had any formal love affair or that he had illegitimate children.

<sup>28</sup> McDonogh Senior to McDonogh, October 5, 1802, February 6, 1806; William Y. Lewis to McDonogh, March 24, 1810, *ibid.* Although he did not marry, McDonogh sometimes felt free to offer advice on love and marriage. See C. Tessier to McDonogh, March 18, 1813; Shepherd to McDonogh, June 27, 1821, *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> The dates given for his removal range from 1815 to 1825, indicating the unreliable and contradictory nature of most of the accounts dealing with this episode in McDonogh's life.

him, save on business or for charity. . . . Everything about his establishment partook of the spirit of the master—all was bleak, cold, dreary and forbidding. The dogs did not bark in his yard—they cast at the passer-by a piteous hungry look, as if they sought some kindly sympathy or notice to comfort their lean carcasses; the cocks did not crow cheerily, as elsewhere, but drawled out their notes in a funereal and hollow strain, as if from empty stomachs. . . . There was no sunshine ever fell upon that spot or upon the heart of its possessor."<sup>30</sup>

This legend is completely false and has been exposed by several authors,<sup>31</sup> still it refuses to die. McDonogh's residence consisted of two brick wings, each two stories high, designed for a larger central structure which was never built. In form it was plain and unwhitewashed, but solidly constructed. It rested behind a low levee on the border of the river; a shell or gravel road passed in front, leading from Mechanicsham, a village built by Nicholas Noel Destréhan, and reaching the ferry landing, about a mile below McDonogh's house.

McDonogh occupied three rooms on the second floor of the north wing of his residence.<sup>32</sup> Other rooms on the second floor were reserved for guests, storage of expensive liquors, and vaults for money and papers. Most of the ground floor consisted of storage rooms, with perhaps a few workrooms and bedrooms for domestic servants. As far as can be determined, only two eyewitness descriptions of the house and its rooms have come down to us.<sup>33</sup>

One day after his death a newspaper reporter visited and inspected the residence of the deceased philanthropist. He found that McDonogh had lived in a style far different from that created by legend:

That he did not wholly deprive himself of the comforts of life, as is supposed, we have had ocular demonstration of. On Sunday last, when attending on, or rather previous to, the funeral . . . we visited the small sitting

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in "Death of John M'Donogh," *Spirit of the Times*, XX (November, 1850), 464. Similar remarks may be found in Abraham O. Hall, *The Manhattaner in New Orleans* (New York, 1851), 188; "John McDonogh," *Louisiana Journal of Education*, II (May, 1880), 77; *Baltimore American*, December 11, 1904.

<sup>31</sup> Among those who have denied its validity are Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 34; Fortier, *A History of Louisiana*, IV, 239; John Smith Kendall, "New Orleans' Miser Philanthropist," *New Orleans Roosevelt Review* (August, 1943), 8.

<sup>32</sup> Kendall, "New Orleans' Miser Philanthropist," *New Orleans Roosevelt Review* (July, 1943), 21.

<sup>33</sup> That is, aside from the dry facts of the McDonogh Estate inventory. Interesting conclusions about McDonogh's style of living can be drawn from these facts.



room or parlor of the deceased and were surprised to find it compactly, if not neatly, furnished and papered. On the mantel piece were two petit vases . . . brass fender and andirons, an escrutoire, chairs and tables were in the apartment. On one of the tables were strewn many books.<sup>34</sup>

The second account, based on an inspection seven years later, might have been the foundation for some of the later stories of McDonogh's cheerless existence. The visitor found the estate in a sad state of decay, dirty, dilapidated, and weed-grown. To him the residence was "the most ugly and inconvenient that could be selected." McDonogh's parlor, dining room, and sleeping chamber were "little, old-fashioned, cramped-up rooms, with little smothering windows." In the rear of the house was "a long range of plain old brick buildings, elevated to two stories in the center," the middle portion containing a hospital upstairs and a chapel on the ground floor. McDonogh's Negroes were housed in this building. The Pavilion Garden, "covered by one of the finest groves of trees and shrubs in the South," alone had been restored to its former glory.<sup>35</sup>

McDonogh was comfortably housed, used linen of fine quality, and had mahogany furniture. He used silverware at his meals, enjoyed a balanced diet of meats, fruits, milk, and vegetables, and either consumed moderate quantities of liquor or reserved such refreshment for his guests. Coffee, tea, white sugar, and butter were also served. He did not entertain lavishly, but on the other hand he never deprived himself of the comforts of life.<sup>36</sup>

The dress of McDonogh has been the subject of other legends portraying him as clothed in patched, threadbare garments long since out of style. Some basis for such beliefs does exist, for the inventoried value of his wardrobe came to \$30. On November 9, 1850, one newspaper satirically remarked that a promoter could

<sup>34</sup> *New Orleans Daily Orleanian*, October 30, 1850.

<sup>35</sup> *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, October 5, 1857. Much of McDonoghville, including the ruins of McDonogh's residence, rest at the bottom of the river. There was a serious cave-in as early as 1844. During the Civil War McDonogh's house was used as a powder magazine and was damaged by an explosion. Floods and erosion by the river current ate into the estate, forcing the levee back beyond even the slave quarters. Today no trace of the estate remains. Federal Writers' Project, *New Orleans City Guide* (Boston, 1938), 360; Fulson, "Some Studies in the Life of John McDonogh," 42.

<sup>36</sup> Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 34. For typical purchases of luxury items see receipt for butter, Wakefield and Wells to McDonogh, December 28, 1848; receipt for imported wines, Montgomery and Stringer to McDonogh, August 18, 1818, Duke University Collection of McDonogh Papers. He seemed to have maintained a carriage and coachman even after moving across the river. See J. R. Fitzgerald to McDonogh, March 20, 1818, McDonogh Papers.

make money by exhibiting McDonogh's garments as a curiosity. Childs quoted Captain William James, who knew McDonogh intimately, as his authority for the statement that McDonogh dressed well in clothing of best quality, even if the style was outmoded.<sup>37</sup>

Those who had brief glimpses of McDonogh were not so favorably impressed as was Captain James. Abraham Oakey Hall wrote, after a visit to New Orleans in the 1840's: "During my visit . . . my attention became early attracted to a tall gaunt figure, which, clad in a suit of blue cloth—the coat having brass buttons—surmounted by a rather faded hat; the neck covered by a white neck-kerchief, not of the most spotless hue; which tightly grasping in its hand the handle of a green umbrella sculled through the streets at a rapid rate. This was Mr. McDonough." Severn Teackle Wallis, traveler and author, also viewed McDonogh's figure with a hypercritical eye, declaring that he looked "very much like a somewhat ascetic country clergyman, ill supported by his parish."<sup>38</sup>

Closely related to the stories of McDonogh's scanty, worn wardrobe is the legend of his miserliness, but this slander on his character is sheer fiction. One could devote an entire book merely to the refutation of this baseless lie; in fact, part of this work might be viewed as proof that McDonogh was not a miser. He educated some of his brothers, one of his sisters, and a number of nieces and nephews. He sheltered his former employer after the latter's bankruptcy and also housed various orphans on his estate. With his money he educated at least five orphans in addition to providing college training for three Negro youths. Through his philanthropy more than one hundred valuable slaves eventually found freedom in Liberia.

<sup>37</sup> New Orleans *Daily Orleanian*, November 9, 1850; Childs, *John McDonogh*, 32. When he purchased clothing, McDonogh bought only the best. In 1825 he paid \$35 for one coat. See receipt for a coat, Lee and Walton to McDonogh, May 11, 1825, Duke University Collection of McDonogh Papers.

<sup>38</sup> Hall, *The Manhattaner in New Orleans*, 187; *Writings of Severn Teackle Wallis*, 4 vols. (Memorial ed., Baltimore, 1896), I, 195, Walker, "John McDonogh the Millionaire," *Continental Monthly*, II (August, 1862), 165, contains the most vivid description of McDonogh to be found anywhere: He was "tall and straight as a pillar, with stern, determined features, lit up by eyes of uncommon, almost unnatural brilliancy . . . with his hair combed back and gathered in a sort of queue, and dressed in the fashion of half a century ago, to wit, an old blue coat, with high collar, well-brushed and patched but somewhat 'seedy' pantaloons . . . hat somewhat more modern, but bearing unmistakable proof of long service and exposure to sun and rain; old round-toed shoes, the top-leathers of which had survived more soles than the wearer had outlived *souls* of his early friends and companions; a scant white vest, ruffled shirt, and voluminous white cravat, completed the costume of this singular gentleman, who, with his ancient blue silk umbrella under his arm, and his fierce eye fixed on some imaginary goal ahead, made his way through the struggling crowds."

His entire life was marked by charitable donations and activities of a philanthropic nature. He contributed annually to one or more colonization societies after 1835. The Ursuline nuns knew him as "the friend of the poor and the tender father of the helpless orphan." A few of his many acts of Christian charity will show that the nuns were not employing hollow flattery. In 1835 McDonogh aided the sufferers of a disaster in New Brunswick. Three years later he contributed most of the \$1,500 given to the Asylum for Destitute Orphan Boys. Not many years after that he sent a check to Mrs. McLean for the cause of Negro education in Ohio. Shortly thereafter he helped a poor widow.<sup>39</sup>

Another fiction concerning McDonogh is that he had no social visitors at his place, that his only companions were his Negroes, and that he never invited people to his house. Nothing could be further from the truth; McDonogh enjoyed the society of friends even after he had retired from his gay social life. Among his visitors were Andrew and Thomas Durnford, Reverend Robert S. Finley, Reverend Gurley, Cresson, Christian Roselius, Judah Touro, Alfred Hennen, and Miss Johnston. William Taylor lived there for several years, as did some of the orphans befriended by McDonogh.<sup>40</sup>

Even some of the best of McDonogh's biographers have perpetuated the belief that he lived a secluded life; his letters, however, explode this legend. "Frequently he left the city to inspect his near-by possessions, to consult his lawyers in other parishes, to advise his agents, and to appear in court."<sup>41</sup> Never, except in periods of severe illness or inclement weather did he remain any length of time at home in the period 1817-1844. After the latter date, the infirmities of old age curtailed his movements.

Not many months after he moved across the river he wrote to Innerarity, "I am  $\frac{3}{4}$  of my time absent from the city." To the same friend he reported in 1820 that he was frequently absent

<sup>39</sup> Mother François de Sales Bowlins to McDonogh, June 27, 1822, quoted in Fulson, "Some Studies in the Life of John McDonogh," 56; J. J. Janeway to McDonogh, August 24, 1835; Auguste Commandeur and others to McDonogh, December 22, 1838; Mrs. McLean to McDonogh, June 29, 1846; Mrs. Bringier to McDonogh, July 5, 1847, McDonogh Papers. Even guest speakers at McDonogh School in Maryland have been guilty of perpetuating the myth of McDonogh's miserliness. John H. B. Latrobe said to the pupils of the school in 1880: "No portion [of McDonogh's wealth] was turned into the current of luxury or lost in the sea of sensual pleasures; nor was any portion of it conveyed through channels of affection and kindness to his relatives or early friends, or to the suffering poor around him." *Address Delivered 20th November, 1880 (The 7th Anniversary of the Founding of the School.)* by John H. B. Latrobe before the Pupils of the McDonogh Institute (Baltimore, 1881), 5.

<sup>40</sup> For evidence of the presence of visitors in McDonogh's house, see Nathan and Hermann to McDonogh, July 12, 1822; McDonogh to Christian Hoover, August 27, 1848, McDonogh Papers. A letter of McDonogh to Kirkland, January 8, 1831, *ibid.*, furnishes proof that McDonogh did invite guests to his home.

<sup>41</sup> Kane, "John McDonogh: Land Speculator," 28-29.



"from the city into the country." Two years later he was still quite busy traveling and spoke of his "almost constant absence from the city." A letter to Shepherd, February, 1829, indicated that he was still active, being almost continually absent "from the City for the last three months, into different parts of the country, where" he was "engaged in selling and surveying sugar lands which are now all the rage."<sup>42</sup>

The 1830's found him as busy as ever making trips about the state. During the winter of 1830-1831 he was away from home for a week or more at a time; with the return of good weather in the spring his absences from home grew more extended. The remainder of the decade provided no cessation of travel, and in 1838 or 1839 he might have made a trip by steamboat to St. Louis. As late as 1844 he spoke of his "repeated absences from the city into different parts of the State."<sup>43</sup>

Whenever McDonogh was free from the cares of travel, he spent considerable time in New Orleans, attending to his multifarious business affairs. A Negro slave rowed the skiff in which he crossed the river and his landing point was that part of town above Canal Street.<sup>44</sup> It was his custom to walk to his city office. Sometimes he also stopped at the city post office, although the task of picking up his mail was usually the responsibility of one of his slaves. He paid annual rental on a box at the post office.<sup>45</sup>

Principally because of his refusal to disperse his estate among his numerous relatives, McDonogh has been accused of being cold towards them, yet his correspondence with them breathed a loving, warmly human spirit.<sup>46</sup> He did not dislike his brothers and sisters, nor did he refuse to aid them whenever they were faced

<sup>42</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, October 19, 1842, McDonogh Papers. Washington July 25, 1822; McDonogh to Shepherd, February 16, 1829, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>43</sup> McDonogh to Robert R. Brandon, November 13, 1830; McDonogh to John Buhler, January 7, 1831; McDonogh to Shepherd, April 9, 1831; McDonogh to James M. Bradford, December 16, 1833; McDonogh to Reverend Charles C. Jones, January 26, 1835; Mrs. M. Dreschler to McDonogh, November 29, 1841; McDonogh to Augustus R. McDonogh, May 20, 1844, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> McDonogh did not use the ferry because its landing was almost a mile from his house. Furthermore, it was not until the 1830's that a regular ferry service was instituted. Cable (ed.), *Historical Sketch Book and Guide to New Orleans*, 304. Mrs. L. O. Broussard, a neighbor of the author, gave him two anecdotes about McDonogh, illustrating the public's view of his stinginess. One day McDonogh parted with his battered old hat, giving it to the servant who did his rowing. The Negro found it too dirty to wear in its present condition, so he had it cleaned and blocked, whereupon McDonogh liked the rejuvenated headgear so much that he took it away from the slave! On another occasion McDonogh noticed that the hard boards of the skiff were causing undue wear to the seat of his trousers; thereafter, when being rowed across, he took down his trousers and sat in his underwear.

<sup>45</sup> "John McDonogh," *Louisiana Journal of Education*, II (May, 1880), 77; McDonogh to R. N. Ogden, August 11, 1841; Receipt for rental of a box in the post office, January 1, 1845, McDonogh Papers; New Orleans *New Delta*, May 2, 1891.

<sup>46</sup> For two emotional, tender letters to his sisters, see McDonogh to Elizabeth Pogue, April 15, 1839; McDonogh to Mary Cole, May 13, 1845, *ibid.*

with economic crises. In his eyes the educational philanthropy he had planned was superior to the needs of individuals and best fulfilled the trust placed in him by God—that is why he bequeathed nothing to any of his relatives except his sister, Jane.

The secretiveness of McDonogh in regard to his manumission plan and his will has been overemphasized.<sup>47</sup> To several of his correspondents he hinted at or revealed the outlines of his scheme of manumission almost ten years before it was published in pamphlet form. A few of his friends were well aware of his intentions to devote his estate to charitable purposes. And, as will be shown in a later chapter, he allowed Christian Roselius to read his entire will. In general, the public was seldom told about his donations to charity, hence the supposition that he was a miser. Conceding this dislike for making his activities common knowledge, one must be careful not to endow McDonogh with a pathological degree of introversion.

The legend of McDonogh's industry is one of those amply proved by subsequent research. Childs did not exaggerate when he stated: "From early morning until late at night he toiled, devoting eighteen hours a day to the laborious task of transacting the business of his vast estates."<sup>48</sup> His voluminous correspondence alone testified to the incredible expenditure of energy that enabled him to manage his holdings. It seemed that he often worked from dawn until ten or eleven o'clock at night, after which he might write letters until early morning. His will takes up more than twenty-six printed pages, yet he made at least two long-hand copies of it. Many of his letters were five to ten pages long, and the letter on manumission required over thirty pages of type.

To John Dutton he wrote in 1839 that he had "a mass of business which" left him "not a moments leisure night or day." He repeated the same complaint to Mrs. L. B. Garrard (later Mrs. McLean) early in 1843. In a letter to Mrs. Hannah Meredith, daughter of William Taylor, he declared that his business affairs did not permit him to relax "from labor night or day." Even when sixty-five years of age he was unable to find rest from his affairs.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> One example of this overemphasis is found in the *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, October 5, 1857. All of McDonogh's plans and enterprises, the paper declared, were carried "out in his own proper person, all . . . without the counseling whisper of a friend, the pen of a clerk, or even the cheap aid of a public collector."

<sup>48</sup> Childs, *John McDonogh*, 17.

<sup>49</sup> McDonogh to Dutton, May 23, 1839; McDonogh to Mrs. Garrard, February 3, 1843; McDonogh to Mrs. Meredith, April 19, 1843; McDonogh to Reverend Gurley, April 11, 1846, McDonogh Papers.

In spite of all the business cares that afflicted him, he managed to aid children and to advise them; his love for youngsters was a sincere, beautiful thing and waxed stronger as old age brought him nearer the end of his own life's journey. An anecdotal story based on his love for children and flowers was printed in the *New Delta*, May 2, 1891. McDonogh used to sit in front of his office and observe the little girls who passed on their way to the old Franklin School nearby. One day a pretty child felt compassion for the melancholy gentleman and out of the tender emotion of a pure heart placed a bouquet of flowers in his hands. McDonogh swallowed a hard lump in his throat, his eyes blurring as he gazed upon the innocent face that smiled up at him. When he stooped to thank her, he had tears in his eyes.<sup>50</sup> His sincere love for young people received its final expression in his testamentary request that school children annually decorate his grave with fragrant blossoms.

The lovely Pavilion Garden was a result of McDonogh's love for and interest in plants of every description. It contained imported shrubs and rare flowers as well as native specimens. In 1836 McDonogh asked a friend to ship hedges and shrubs from England. The fame of his garden by this time had spread beyond the city limits; people frequently wrote for seeds of this plant or cuttings from that one. C. L. Bell of "Willow Grove" plantation asked for a cutting from a special kind of willow tree and for seeds from the Parasite Vine. Mrs. Elizabeth Howard residing near Mobile desired some of his "beautiful Jessup plants."<sup>51</sup>

Supervision of his garden must have added to McDonogh's burdens even though it brought pleasure to him. Yet in spite of his many duties he still found time to read periodicals and newspapers. He complained that he never had a leisure moment to read newspapers, but he was indulging in harmless exaggeration. Actually he received issues of two or more New Orleans papers, besides pamphlets and periodicals from several societies.<sup>52</sup>

Not even a large volume could explore all of the McDonogh legends, but the most important ones have been discussed above. Only two more need be considered. One concerns a diary which

<sup>50</sup> New Orleans *New Delta*, May 2, 1891. Childs, *John McDonogh*, 41-42, gave the same story.

<sup>51</sup> McDonogh to Herman Sevier [?], July 14, 1836; Bell to McDonogh, February 17, 1842; Mrs. Howard to McDonogh, December 10, 1844, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>52</sup> Kane, "John McDonogh: Land Speculator," 73; receipts for subscriptions to the New Orleans *Argus*, January 21, July 20, 1833; receipt for a subscription to the "Society of Agriculture," August 7, 1833, McDonogh Papers.



McDonogh allegedly kept. He seemed to have some method of recording past events, judging from his uncanny ability to recall what had happened years before; whether or not the tool that aided his memory was a diary is a question that cannot be answered with any degree of certainty until tangible evidence has been unearthed. John S. Kendall asserted that McDonogh kept a diary, but he offered no proof for his statement.<sup>53</sup>

Sentimental Orleanians like to discuss McDonogh's love for his adopted city: they may be shocked to learn that he did not hold the city or the state in high esteem, that he regretted having made his home in Louisiana. Numbed by the loss of his brother William the previous year, he expressed a wish in 1833 to move to Virginia. Shepherd was advised to leave Boston and take up the life of a gentleman farmer in the Old Dominion. "Do this, and I will try to join you and become your neighbor in a few years," McDonogh promised. In the summer of that year he wrote to his sister, Mary Cole: "From what I have experienced, was my life to commence over it would not be in Louisiana that I would spend it." He denounced New Orleans as "the most depraved, and dissolute of all cities."<sup>54</sup>

McDonogh's removal across the river was productive of a rich growth of legends concerning his life and character, but the event also had an importance of its own. It started McDonogh on one of his greatest roles: that of the liberal slaveholder. Once he had become directly concerned with plantation management, he awoke to the evils as well as the advantages of slavery, and his efforts to ameliorate harsh features of the "peculiar institution" won the respect of colonization societies everywhere. The former slave trader in time became one of the most famous supporters of African Colonization and wrote widely read papers on manumission in addition to expending thousands of dollars for the cause.

Even in his own lifetime McDonogh was a man of legend, a rich, eccentric old gentleman about whom hundreds of fanciful

<sup>53</sup> Kendall, "New Orleans' Miser Philanthropist," *New Orleans' Roosevelt Review* (August, 1943), 8.

<sup>54</sup> McDonogh to Shepherd, April 14, 1833; McDonogh to Mary Cole, July 6, 1833, McDonogh Papers. McDonogh's suffering in the damp winters of his adopted state might have influenced his opinion. Explaining to the consumptive Shepherd B. Eaty why he should not settle in Louisiana, he wrote: "I have to observe that our winters are in general very wet, damp and cold, from the prevalence of North-Easterly winds: our country, as you know, is very low, being removed only a few feet above the level of the sea, and of consequence humid and covered with fogs in the winter. Indeed it often happens from the constant rains that prevail in the winter season here, and the state of the streets of our city, covered with mud, that we are literally confined to our houses for months, unable to take any exercise or go about." McDonogh to Eaty, September 16, 1835, *ibid.*

stories had been woven. After his death, other legends concerning him were created by newspapers, and by writers who had hasty glimpses of scattered documents. Not until the 1890's was there any attempt to do careful research on his life, but by that time the legends had jelled into "accepted facts."

Legends create color in what otherwise might be a prosaic, dull history, but they also serve to obscure the facts. Only extensive study enables one to sift the mixture of truth and fancy with any degree of certainty. The author has learned to exercise caution before relegating a McDonogh legend to the realm of fiction—research has demonstrated that many of the legends are in all essential respects true, and that others have a definite factual basis.

So far as can be determined, McDonogh had no formal love affairs, nor did he have any illegitimate children as some have charged. He might have had several mistresses and his renting of two or more houses in his *bon vivant* days could be proof that he supported them.

The story of his squalid, secluded life in McDonoghville is false, for he lived a simple but comfortable existence, frequently receiving visitors or making trips into other parts of the state. Equally fallacious is the legend of his miserliness and his coldness toward his kin. On the other hand, the legend of his harsh, exacting character in business is true to a large degree.

McDonogh was a gay social figure in the decade between 1804 and 1816, maintained a fine bachelor's establishment, rode in an expensive carriage, entertained the notables of the city, and was invited to exclusive social affairs. He had entered this sort of life partly for business reasons, partly as a rebellion from his strict Calvinist training, and partly for the thrill. He succumbed to the lure of social affairs until a crisis in his finances, the growing need for personal supervision of his estate, a religious awakening, and a revulsion of feeling against his sinful life led him to abandon the bright arena of social pleasure.

Once established across the river he was able to give more thought to his goal in life and to the philanthropies that were being planned for the future. With the problems of slavery now vividly before him, he was induced to turn his energies into those channels that brought him fame as a liberal slaveholder and foremost colonizationist.

## CHAPTER VI

## THE FOSTER FATHER OF LIBERIAN COLONISTS

On July 1, 1842, Galloway Smith, one of the colonists, wrote a letter to his former master, telling him that the *Mariposa* had arrived safely at Norfolk after an eleven-day voyage marred only by seasickness among the passengers. Shortly after their arrival, the colonists had contracted a fever from drinking canal water. Fortunately, all who had been stricken had recovered and were in high spirits as they looked forward confidently to the future. While their ship took on more cargo and additional passengers, the colonists waited for the arrival of Washington McDonogh, not knowing that he had sailed for Liberia from Philadelphia a week before they arrived at Norfolk. The *Mariposa* began the long voyage to Africa on or about July 4.<sup>1</sup>

The next letter which McDonogh received was written by Washington McDonogh, September 5, 1842, from Settra Kroo, a mission school not far from Monrovia, Liberia. Washington stated that he had received McDonogh's letter of April 15, but had no time to answer it because at the same time Walter Lowrie had advised him to finish his work at Lafayette College and come to New York. He left Lafayette College on June 10, hurried to New York, remained there for two days, and then journeyed to Philadelphia. He sailed from that port on June 16. The ship passed Cape Verde on July 16, continued along the coast for two days, and anchored five miles below a settlement on the Gambier River. Washington went ashore there for one day before resuming the voyage to Sierra Leone; there he remained from July 28 to August 13, while his ship discharged cargo. The vessel then set sail for Monrovia, arriving there shortly after the *Mariposa* had entered the harbor. The colonists had reached the capital of Liberia on Sunday, August 21, after a voyage of forty-four days.<sup>2</sup> Washington remained with them until August 27, when he sailed for his final destination, Settra Kroo.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Galloway Smith to McDonogh, July 1, 1842; Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, September 5, 1842; Reverend Gurley to McDonogh, July 2, 1842, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, September 5, October 19, 1842, *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, October 19, 1842, *ibid.* In this letter Washington stated that he had sailed from Monrovia on August 26, but in his letter of September 5, he gave August 27 as the date. Since he wrote the latter message only fifteen days after the colonists reached Monrovia, the date given in it would be more trustworthy.



Washington felt that the prospects of McDonogh's people were good in this new land where a pleasant climate and fertile soil combined to increase chances of survival and of a rapid start at farming. Much depended on the character of the settler: if he was industrious, all was well; if he was lazy and dishonest, he would quickly turn to the ways of the natives who "wont [*sic*] work if they find that they can get a along [*sic*] by stealing." The first trial that had to be undergone by almost every newcomer was an attack of fever;<sup>4</sup> epidemics among those inhabitants who had become acclimated were not frequent.

In his letter of September 5, Washington asked for money and a corn grinding mill.<sup>5</sup> Most of the colonists who wrote to McDonogh were equally frank in their requests for money, tools, and other supplies.<sup>6</sup> McDonogh heeded some of the requests of his people, for on May 6, 1843, he sent two barrels of flour and one barrel of molasses to Phillis McDonogh.<sup>7</sup>

One of the first colonists to establish himself was Washington, who had begun, almost immediately after his arrival, to teach a tiny mission school at Settra Kroo, under the guidance of a Reverend Sawyer. On October 19, 1842, Washington spoke about the internal dissension that had developed over the question of staying at Monrovia or moving on to Blue Barra on the Sinoe River, as McDonogh had ordered.<sup>8</sup>

When Washington first arrived at the thriving city of Monrovia,<sup>9</sup> he found his comrades wandering all over the town and making no effort to reorganize for a voyage to that home which had been planned for them. Many conflicting reasons were given by the colonists, but he placed the entire blame on "George" (probably James McGeorge Taylor) and Galloway Smith who

<sup>4</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, September 5, October 19, 1842, *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, September 5, 1842, *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Galloway Smith to McDonogh, February 3, 1844; George R. Ellis McDonogh to McDonogh, April 14, 1844; James McGeorge Taylor to McDonogh, May 20, 1844; Nancy Smith to McDonogh, July 3, 1848, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Ship's cargo list, May 6, 1843; George R. Ellis McDonogh to McDonogh, September (n. d.), 1843; James McGeorge Taylor to McDonogh, November 17, 1843, *ibid.* McGeorge informed McDonogh that a cargo of supplies sent out by him was lost when the ship *Renown* hit a reef and sank off the coast of Africa. *Ibid.* Walter Lowrie acknowledged the receipt of \$70 as a gift for Washington, but the latter apparently did not receive the money. See Lowrie to McDonogh, October 2, 1845; Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, February 18, 1846, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, February 18, 1846, October 19, 1842; James McGeorge Taylor to McDonogh, March 6, 1843, *ibid.* In their references to Blue Barra on the Sinoe River, the colonists sometimes called it Snow or Sinau. The three names refer to the same place.

<sup>9</sup> The city of Monrovia, located on Cape Mesurado at the mouth of the Mesurado River, was a town of fair size as early as 1836. At that time it contained 500 homes and stores, a courthouse, one Episcopal, one Presbyterian, two Baptist, and two Methodist churches, and three schools. Its population was 1,500. Frederick Freeman, *Yarades* (Philadelphia, 1836), 207.

were the first to come ashore at Monrovia.<sup>10</sup> According to their own statements, the two men had been told by the Governor of Monrovia that the natives at Blue Barra were hostile and would destroy them if they went to the new district while they were still weak from fever.<sup>11</sup> Although Washington placed little value on this explanation, there is definite evidence that it played an important role in defeating McDonogh's wishes that his people go to Blue Barra and form the nucleus of a new colony.<sup>12</sup>

The American Colonization Society was beset by difficulties in attempting to meet the wishes of McDonogh and not the least of these troubles was the loss of the *Renown*. The vessel had struck a reef in a dense fog off the coast of Liberia and had sunk without loss of life but with destruction of its entire cargo. As a large portion of its cargo, the *Renown* carried many hundreds of pounds of tools and supplies destined for Monrovia. The city government could not risk depletion of its stores to re-equip McDonogh's people. The Society continued to urge the colonial officials at Monrovia to move McDonogh's people to Blue Barra as soon as possible. On April 9, 1844, the Reverend McLain informed McDonogh that Governor Joseph Roberts of Monrovia and the Colonial Secretary had offered many inducements to the colonists to move to Blue Barra. They were to be paid for their lands and improvements, transported free of charge, and provisioned until they had established themselves at Blue Barra, but all these promised benefits could not alter their determination to remain on their comfortable and prosperous farms along the Saint Paul River.<sup>13</sup>

In spite of the evidence that his people were contented and prosperous in their settlement on the Saint Paul and did not want to move,<sup>14</sup> McDonogh was as determined as ever that they

<sup>10</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, October 19, 1842, McDonogh Papers. Washington declared that his brother told him "McGeorge and Galoway was [sic] the cause of the whole they came ashore here with the Captain and got persuaded [sic] by the settlers here to stop here and not to go to Snow just as you told them before they left home." *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> James McGeorge Taylor to McDonogh, May 20, 1844, *ibid.* McGeorge explained that they had not gone to Sinoe because of fever among the colonists and because of unsettled conditions there. Only after they had set themselves up on the Saint Paul River did they learn that a peace had been arranged with the Sinoe district natives by American naval officers who had gone ashore there. *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> James McGeorge Taylor to McDonogh, November 17, 1843; Cresson to McDonogh, December 4, 1844. Cresson explained that "on the arrival of the *Mariposa*, your people were so little disposed to proceed down the Coast to the place you had selected . . . that they refused leaving St. Paul's Country. And it was by the loss of the *Renown*, together with the valuable stores & implements sent out by her, that the Society was, after your dissatisfaction had been known, unable to transfer them to 'McDonogh' [the name given to the town site marked out at Sinoe], even had your people been willing to remove. The apprehended hostilities of the natives doubtless had much weight in their decision." *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Reverend McLain to McDonogh, August 2, 1843, April 9, 1844; Cresson to McDonogh, December 4, 1844, *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> James Gray to McDonogh, January 28, 1844; George R. Ellis McDonogh to McDonogh, April 14, 1844; James McGeorge Taylor to McDonogh, November 13, 1843, *ibid.*

should go to Blue Barra. "All our friends, now at Monrovia and St. Pauls," he wrote to Walter Lowrie in January, 1844, "must go down to Blue Barra." He explained to Lowrie the reasons why the colonists had stopped at Monrovia; it was his settled conviction that the Governor had refused to take them to Blue Barra, even upon the insistence of Reverend Gurley who had been in Liberia in 1842 and 1843. "This occurrence, has mortified me much, and I insist, and shall insist, on their being taken down and placed on the spot they were originally destined for."<sup>15</sup> Apparently only one of McDonogh's adult male colonists moved to Blue Barra. This individual seems to have been Galloway Smith who had been accused by Washington as one of the leaders of the faction that had encouraged the people to remain in Monrovia. Smith wrote from Blue Barra, February 3, 1844, complaining that he had been prosperous until he had moved to the new land and that of all McDonogh's people, he and his wife were the only ones to move. Smith must have been in economic distress for he asked for cloth and shoes.<sup>16</sup>

Whether the colonists were justified in thus negating the plans of their benefactor is a question that cannot be answered, but there is no doubt that they prospered after having made their decision to stay on the Saint Paul.<sup>17</sup> The reasons for their success were numerous; among the most important were the policies of the American Colonization Society and the physical characteristics (soil, topography, and climate) of Liberia. The Society, drawing on years of experience, spared no expense or labor in providing homes, tools, clothing, and food for the newly arrived colonists.<sup>18</sup> The Theological Seminary of Princeton in 1832 published a pamphlet on the work being done by the Society, in which it particularly lauded the land policy of the Liberian government. "Every emigrant is welcome in the colony," the paper declared, "and receives a grant of five acres of land, besides which he can purchase as much as he pleases at one dollar per acre."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> McDonogh to Lowrie, January 1, 1844, *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Galloway Smith to McDonogh, February 3, 1844, *ibid.* Smith did not remain in Liberia. On June 7, 1847, he sailed from Liberia with 600 pounds of coffee and 400 gallons of palm oil to sell. He arrived in Philadelphia on June 28, 1847, but by that time the ship had developed a leak and spoiled most of his coffee. He planned to return to Liberia on August 20, 1847, and asked McDonogh for money. *Ibid.* Smith was last reported working as a porter for a Philadelphia merchant. See Julia Smith (not his wife) to McDonogh, July 1, 1848, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Reverend Gurley to McDonogh, March 6, 1850; Henrietta Fuller to McDonogh, October 24, 1849, *ibid.* "It is true [that] when we first landed," she wrote, "after the expiration of the Six Months Maintenance from the Society the [sic] we found it a little difficult to do as well as we could wish. Yet we have partially surmounted the difficulties & no[w] are perfectly satisfied." *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Wilkeson to McDonogh, July 9, 1841, *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Princeton Theological Seminary, *Annual Register of Facts Respecting Africans & Colonization* (Princeton, 1832), 9.



Equally important for the welfare of the colonists were the fertile soil, mild climate, and large areas of level country cut by rivers and shielded from the hot winds of the interior by mountains. Liberia had begun as a tiny holding purchased by the Society in the Cape Mesurado region in 1821, and had expanded to cover an area of about 43,000 square miles. Most of the coast of Liberia is low, sandy beach, broken only by a few harbors of any size and traversed by only two important rivers, the Saint Paul and the Cavalla. Not far from the coast are plains and areas of low rolling hills, whose soil is very fertile.<sup>20</sup> "Liberia is on the grain coast, and is protected from the scorching winds of the north and east by ranges of mountains," the *Princeton Register* remarked in 1832. "The soil is fertile and produces an abundance of Indian corn, yams, plantains, coffee, arrow-root, indigo, dyewoods, etc."<sup>21</sup> Other crops that could be grown were rice, cotton, and sugar.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the first of McDonogh's people to make a definite start at farming in the new country was Phillis Watts who did not hesitate to adopt Monrovia as his home in spite of the known wishes of his former master. "I have made a start of farming" he wrote in September, 1843, "and have . . . [several acres on the Saint Paul] planted down in coffee trees and cotton & potatoes." He complained that the seeds McDonogh had given him did not grow and that the loss of supplies on the *Renown* hit him hard because "provisions are very scarce here at present."<sup>23</sup>

At about the same time that Watts began his work in agriculture, George R. Ellis McDonogh set out some seven or eight hundred coffee plants on his small "plantation" on the Saint Paul. He planted cotton, too, and it was estimated by his brother Washington that their mother had gathered ten pounds from the first crop. Like Washington, George Ellis was a faithful correspondent with McDonogh; his letters give a detailed picture of his life in Liberia and the expansion of his planting activities. In April, 1845, he reported to McDonogh that he had cleared fifteen or twenty acres and had planted, in addition to several hundred

<sup>20</sup> George W. Brown, *The Economic History of Liberia* (Washington, 1941), 18, 23; Frederick Starr, "Liberia," *Encyclopedia Americana* (1942 edition), XVII, 310-11.

<sup>21</sup> Princeton Theological Seminary, *Annual Register of Facts Respecting Africans*, 9; Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, February 18, 1846, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>22</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, October 17, 1846; Phillis Watts to McDonogh, September (n. d.), 1843; George R. Ellis McDonogh to McDonogh, March 23, 1847; James McGeege Taylor to McDonogh, May 20, 1844, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>23</sup> Phillis Watts to McDonogh, September (n. d.), 1843, *ibid.*

coffee trees, potatoes, cassadoes, arrow-root, corn, and cotton. Yet in spite of his apparent success he was the boldest of all the colonists in asking McDonogh for gifts.<sup>24</sup>

The subject of forays by jungle beasts filled George Ellis's next letter. On May 14, 1844, he reported that he had suffered several nocturnal visits from leopards, one of which carried away two goats and a hog. His efforts to track down the beasts had been futile and he had failed to see the creatures at any time. Also, he had seen a snake over fifteen feet long on his farm. In order to guard his land and livestock, he needed large, husky dogs. Would McDonogh send two of them to him?<sup>25</sup>

The next letter from George Ellis, dated March 20, 1846, was a request for seeds and supplies. "Sir I wish you would be so kind as to send me out some seed of all description[s]" he wrote, "and any thing which you may think proper . . . for this like all other new countries is a very hard one." This pleading had become a habit, although poverty or dire need did not afflict the colonists. In 1846 Washington visited his brother, found him doing very well and told McDonogh that George Ellis had "on his farm about twenty four or five bound boys [and] some of them were taken from on board of a slaver by an American man of war."<sup>26</sup> These unfortunate blacks who were rescued from captured slave ships were hired out to or put under the guidance of Liberians who worked and trained them for a limited period.<sup>27</sup> In some respects this practice was similar to the system of labor by indentured servants.

By 1847 George Ellis could make excellent use of additional workers for his farm had grown until it contained thirty or forty acres under cultivation. His estate was fenced with a lime hedge serving not only to set off his land from that of his neighbors, but also to keep out wild beasts. The coffee yield from the farm

<sup>24</sup> George R. Ellis McDonogh to McDonogh, September (n. d.), 1843, April 14, 1844; Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, February 7, 1844, *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> George R. Ellis McDonogh to McDonogh, May 14, 1844, *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> George R. Ellis McDonogh to McDonogh, March 20, 1846; Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, October 7, 1846, *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> On March 3, 1819, Congress passed an act which authorized the President to make arrangements for the safekeeping of recaptives (Negroes taken from ships captured while engaged in the illegal foreign slave trade) until they could be transported to Africa. Under this act, agents were appointed and given funds to help the American Colonization Society in transporting the blacks. *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, May 30, 1860* (Boston, 1860), 33. In the thirty-two years from 1819 to 1851, over one thousand recaptives were sent to Liberia. *Eleventh Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, May 26, 1852* (Boston, 1852), 7-8. These recaptives were parceled out among the Liberians who were obligated to clothe, feed, educate, and Christianize the Negroes in return for their labor over a limited period. *Twentieth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, May 29, 1861* (Boston, 1861), 28. Rev. Alexander Grummell reported that "on the St. Paul's, numbers of recaptured slaves are apprenticed out." *Ibid.*

must have been satisfactory; the proud planter sent a sample to his former master. At the same time he informed McDonogh with pride that a flock of turkeys kept by his mother had increased from an original five brought over from America to twenty or thirty.<sup>28</sup>

Although George Ellis was a chronic complainer, he showed praiseworthy qualities as well. He was a faithful provider for his family, took care of his aged mother, and displayed a generous loyalty toward his relatives. His love for his kindred was sorely tried in the events which took place after the deaths of his eldest sister and her husband, James Gray. In February, 1846, Washington wrote to McDonogh, telling him that his brother was now caring for Gray's children who had fled to him for protection after enduring abuse at the hands of an unworthy woman whom Gray had taken for his second wife.<sup>29</sup> Ellis shouldered this extra burden and did his best to feed, clothe, and educate the youngsters. In order to defray part of the expenses, he had asked McDonogh to sell Gray's property in Gretna (located in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana) and to send the money to him. "I find it difficult to support them and school them both," he wrote.<sup>30</sup>

The last news about George Ellis was given in his letter of November 24, 1849, and in Reverend Gurley's letter of March 6, 1850. According to Ellis's letter, he was well established and had acted as host and guide to Reverend Gurley when the latter visited Liberia in 1849.<sup>31</sup> Gurley's letter gave news of Ellis's marriage and of the two children he had fathered. His message is of interest for another reason—it contained a list of the names of McDonogh's people whom the clergyman had visited.<sup>32</sup>

Washington McDonogh also wrote frequent letters to McDonogh, epistles that were valuable not only for the news of colonists and his own missionary work, but also for the record of deaths among McDonogh's people over a span of seven years. Without doubt the climate was healthful for Negroes, but the little

<sup>28</sup> George R. Ellis McDonogh to McDonogh, March 25, 1847, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>29</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, February 18, 1846, *ibid.* Washington characterized the stepmother as a cruel woman who beat the children without cause. *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> George R. Ellis McDonogh to McDonogh, March 25, 1847, *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> George R. Ellis McDonogh to McDonogh, November 24, 1849, *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Reverend Gurley to McDonogh, March 6, 1850, *ibid.* The list given by Gurley included the names of thirty adults and twenty-three children: George R. Ellis McDonogh, his wife and two children; Washington McDonogh and his wife; James McGeorge Taylor; Simon Jackson; Beverly Kelly; George Jackson; Augustus Lambeth (Augustine Lamberth); Joshua Jackson; Andrew Jackson; John Martin; Charles Kelley; Charles Gleason; Rhina Kelly and seven children; Mary Jackson and two children; Polly Jackson; Nancey Jackson and two children; Polly Butler; Julia Lambeth and three children; Molly Jackson and three children; Henrietta Fuller and two children; Nancy (name illegible) and one child; Juda Smith; Rebecca Briggs; Matilda Briggs; Susan Mulcreaks (?); Bridget Ayrea (?) and one child; Tama Morel; and Juda Smith (Gurley seemed to have listed this person twice). *Ibid.*



colony was not immune to sickness. The first deaths recorded were those of Washington's eldest sister and Sarah, daughter of Bridgett; they died on the long journey to Liberia. Within nine months after the colonists landed in Liberia, three more persons died, possibly from fever. On February 7, 1844, Washington sent news of the death of his superior at Settra Koo. Some time in 1845 James Gray died and left his children to the care of a harsh step-mother. In the following year the deaths of Mrs. Connelley's newborn baby and of Mrs. Priest's son were recorded. In 1847 Washington sadly reported the death of Elizabeth, daughter of his eldest sister. Two years later a number of colonists, including Washington's mother, James Fuller, Alexander Jackson, Manuel Fuller, and Catherine Teavis passed away.<sup>33</sup> Thus in a span of seven years the group suffered a recorded loss of fourteen persons, at least eight of whom were children or aged people.

Washington McDonogh, in addition to looking after the welfare and interest of the colonists, also taught school as part of his missionary labors. He did not cease to work despite the fact that he had contracted a recurrent fever, that, from his description, could have been malaria. He continued to direct the studies of twenty-eight boys and three girls. He had plans to take over another mission. "I expect to leave this school in a week from this tim[e] . . . to commence a new school about 10 or 12 miles below" Settra Kroo, he wrote in February, 1844. These plans did not materialize quickly because as late as December, 1845, he was still at Settra Kroo. In a letter written at that time, he told McDonogh about the mysterious death of a student in the mission yard and the terrified exodus of the other pupils as a result. He had expected some trouble from native witch doctors whom he feared might accuse him of having cast an evil spell upon the dead child.<sup>34</sup>

His fears seem to have been unfounded; a year later he wrote a cheerful letter from Mount Pleasant, his brother's estate on the Saint Paul. "I am now on a visit to my beloved brother [George Ellis] and friends for the first time since 1844," he told McDonogh.<sup>35</sup> He found the surrounding countryside pleasant and beautiful; from his brother's farm he could see the neat, thriving lands of other McDonogh people.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Henrietta Fuller to McDonogh, October 24, 1849; Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, October 19, 1842; August 3, 1843; February 7, 1844; February 18, October 7, 1846; November 13, 1847; October 13, 1849, *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, February 7, 1844; December 28, 1845, *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, February 18, 1846, *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Augustine Lamberth to McDonogh, May 20, 1844; James McGeorge Taylor to McDonogh, May 20, 1844, *ibid.*

Washington's letter of February, 1846, showed clearly the deep attachment he felt for his former master—an attachment that grew into sincere devotion. The expressions of esteem and respect are numerous in most of this young missionary's letters to his guide and foster father. The latter's fatherly advice was gratefully recalled by Washington in 1846: "Sir you need not think that I shall ever forget your kind advice to me." There is proof in this same letter that he valued McDonogh's opinion highly; he had been thinking of getting married and although McDonogh was many hundreds of miles away, this one-time slave sought his consent before making his decision.<sup>37</sup>

The next letter from Washington to McDonogh was by far the most endearing: its words could hardly be surpassed in tender affection by those of a son to a beloved father. He thanked McDonogh for the guidance given him and for the religious ideals he, McDonogh, had inculcated in his soul. He fervently gave thanks to God that he was from birth placed "in the hands of one who has been a father unto me instead of a cruel oppressor, When I was young and foolish you took me from my father and mother into your own dwelling and brought me up as a son instead of a servant." This revealing passage seems to indicate that McDonogh was not only a friend but also, to a surprising extent, a foster father to the best of his slaves. There is sincere emotion in Washington's closing sentence: "I should like very much dear father to see you once more before we leave this world. . . . But I will never consent to leave this Country . . . for this is the only place where a colored person can enjoy his liberty."<sup>38</sup>

This idea, that only in Liberia could the Negro truly enjoy the fruits of freedom, seemed to have been held by a large number of McDonogh's people and probably was the result of his own firm belief and teaching that Liberia was the safest place for the black man. McDonogh had told them that they could never expect equality with the white man and must therefore seek a new life. In his letter of March, 1848, Washington informed his benefactor that he was well "and enjoying the rights of man for although I am in a land of Darkness I have nothing to fear." Simon Jackson, four months later, sent news of himself and several other colonists and stated that "they are all glad you sent them to the Land of liberty." Henrietta Fuller spoke more eloquently: "We now are in the Strictest sense of the word Free. We have a church

<sup>37</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, February 18, 1846, *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, October 7, 1846, *ibid.*

in our village where we worship God & [we have] a school house." She asked McDonogh to tell the free colored people of America that "Liberia is the home for our race & as good a Country as they can find."<sup>39</sup>

To Washington McDonogh, Liberia was indeed a beautiful land but sadly in need of the light of the Gospel. In 1847 he had a boarding school at Verra Kroo, about ten miles from Settra Kroo, where he was "still among the heathens trying to teach them the ways of God, but alast [*sic*] for us we see but little or no fruites of our labours as yet."<sup>40</sup> Still continuing his missionary work, he had returned to Settra Kroo in 1848, where he was joined by a young woman of color, whose talents and character won his heart. He appeared anxious to convince McDonogh that she was a worthy girl. She had been "brought up and educated in one of the best Christian family [*sic*] in Cincinnati," he wrote. "You may know that she is worthy of your Dear Washington."<sup>41</sup>

For some reason, either because McDonogh had become lax in answering the letters of his people or because the mails were being lost, the colonists complained that they had been without letters from him for many months. Washington wrote, in October, 1849. "It has been nearly three years since I have received a line or heard a word from you." In spite of his apparent laxity in answering his people's letters, McDonogh followed their progress with interest and he must have been quite proud of the speedy, efficient manner in which they established themselves and profited by the training he had given them. His people demonstrated their worth not only in agrarian pursuits but also in trade, commerce, and industry. Alexander Jackson was a sugar maker or at least an assistant to one. James McGeorge Taylor's business covered "brickmaking, farming, & building," and he had built, according to his own statement, "the second Brick house in Liberia." The Reverend Gurley reported in 1850 that McGeorge was engaged in the palm oil trade.<sup>42</sup>

Reverend Gurley's visit to Monrovia and to Louisiana on the Saint Paul (the settlement of McDonogh's people) had convinced him that Liberia would attain future greatness. "The Republic

<sup>39</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, March 7, 1848; Simon Jackson to McDonogh, July 3, 1848; Henrietta Fuller to McDonogh, October 24, 1849, *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, November 13, 1847, *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, March 7, 1848, *ibid.* He married the young woman on May 2, 1849. See Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, October 13, 1849, *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Washington McDonogh to McDonogh, October 13, 1849; James McGeorge Taylor to McDonogh, May 20, 1844, October 24, 1849; Reverend Gurley to McDonogh, March 6, 1850, *ibid.*



of Liberia," he prophesied in 1850, "promises to extend its renovating influence & I have no doubt [that it] will finally attract to itself a large proportion of our coloured population, while it will gather many millions of native Africans beneath the shadow of its wings."<sup>43</sup> McDonogh, in reply to this letter, agreed fully and at the same time revealed one of the reasons why he had sent his own freed Negroes to Liberia:

"She [Liberia] must also receive, in time, and that time is not far distant, the slave population of the South, manumitted and sent to their fatherland by their owners. God, in his mercy, is preparing the means and the way. A few years more, and white labor in our country (from the natural as well as foreign increase of our population) will be as cheap as it is now in France and Italy. Whenever that is the case, (and it has been going down lower and lower for many years past,) the slave-holder will not retain his slaves, will not agree to keep nor support them, but will drive them away, as white labor will cost less than it would require to feed, clothe, and lodge his slaves; besides being in other ways more profitable."<sup>44</sup>

In her expansion Liberia came into conflict during the late 1830's and early 1840's with Britain, who had claims to lands both north and south of the new country. Liberia had purchased the rights to the soil and the right to govern Grand Bassa from the natives of the region. Assuming the powers of a recognized and independent government (a status she did not acquire until 1848), she set up import duties on all goods coming into Grand Bassa. When a British trader, a Captain Dring, refused to pay the duty, his goods were seized and sold. Britain sent warships to the west coast and demanded an indemnity of the Liberian government on the grounds that Liberia was only a philanthropic enterprise and not an independent nation, hence she had no power to levy taxes on the goods of foreign powers.<sup>45</sup>

The American Colonization Society now realized that in the face of this threat to the independence of Liberia, it must sever political ties with the country and endeavor to secure recognition for Liberia as an independent state. With the encouragement and blessing of the Society, Liberia issued a declaration of independence and set itself up as a republic on July 26, 1847. She was rec-

<sup>43</sup> Reverend Gurley to McDonogh, March 6, 1850, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> McDonogh to Reverend Gurley, June 10, 1850, published in the *Washington National Intelligencer*, August 22, 1850.

<sup>45</sup> American Colonization Society, Circular Letter to its members, December 10, 1844, McDonogh Papers.

ognized by Britain in 1848 and by France in 1852. It was not until the Civil War that Liberia won recognition from the land whose people had given her birth.<sup>46</sup>

McDonogh maintained contact with his Liberian colonists to the very end of his life, proving a loyal friend, sympathetic guide, and foster father to that small band of black people engaged in carving out their little community in undeveloped Liberia. Although their refusal to carry out all of his plans irked him at times, he forgave them and proudly commented on their progress. Burdened with the heavy weight of years and business affairs, he could ill afford to give time or thought to them; nonetheless he read their letters with lively interest, laboriously copied many of them for publication in Colonization journals, and wrote replies of advice and moral teaching.

He was proud that they regarded him as a father—he encouraged them to address him in familiar, loving fashion. And he saw in their success a tribute to his own ability as manager and teacher and a means of perpetuating his fame. Perhaps he dreamed that some day one of the descendants of a McDonogh Negro family would be president of a great Liberia and would lead a whole nation in honoring his memory.

As a believer in white supremacy, he saw no opportunity for the black man in America. Only in slavery was there safety for the weaker race and in time the increase and cheapness of white labor would render slavery useless. In the bitter economic struggle that would follow, the unwanted Negro would be exterminated, not only by disease, poverty, and starvation, but also in armed clashes. Liberia would serve as a sanctuary and as a field of honorable opportunity for the Negro. From this black Christian republic the blessings of education and the light of the gospel could be made to penetrate the farthest reaches of Africa.

In the quarrel over Sinoe or Blue Barra, McDonogh demonstrated an unreasoning obstinacy and egotism. Even with ample proof that his colonists were happily settled near Monrovia and dreaded moving again, he tried to force their transfer to a new, undeveloped region where many perils, real and imaginary, faced them. For once McDonogh's insight into human nature failed him; blinded by the vision of his own great plan, he ignored the stubborn fact of human inertia. Asking a group of newly established people to forsake their hard-won improvements and to

<sup>46</sup> Reverend McLain to McDonogh, June 14, 1849, *ibid.*; Starr, "Liberia," *Encyclopedia Americana* (1942 edition), XVII, 310-11. Liberia's colonists, most of whom had been slaves and had come to Africa in search of freedom, eventually turned to the use of slave labor. This was reported by a commission of the League of Nations in 1930. *Ibid.*

strike out once more in a wilderness, to expend for a second time a great outburst of energy, was flying in the face of common sense.

To his credit, McDonogh eventually realized his mistake, accepted things as they were, and spoke with pride of each accomplishment made by his people. Like their master they became landowners, planters, traders, manufacturers, and speculators, thereby infusing vigorous new blood into Liberia's economic system. Undoubtedly their descendants today number in the hundreds and many may be among the social, political, and economic élite of the republic. Some day an interesting book on the history of McDonogh's people in Liberia might be written.

## CHAPTER VII

### AND AS IT MUST TO ALL MEN

Death came to John McDonogh. It came swiftly, agonizingly, in the form of Asiatic cholera,<sup>1</sup> a disease from which his brother, William, had perished more than eighteen years before. According to the legend perpetuated by Alexander Walker, the last appearance of McDonogh in New Orleans was dramatic. Two days before his death he was seen walking rapidly, as was his custom, toward the courthouse. Suddenly he paused, passed a trembling hand over his forehead, and stood as if debating an important question in his mind. Then, to the amazement of unbelieving spectators, he boarded an omnibus to complete his journey. The news spread like wildfire until most of the city had heard—McDonogh the "miser" had spent a few pennies to ride the omnibus! Not until Saturday, when the people learned of his death, did the reason for his "extravagance" become clear; he had felt the first dizzy spell that was a prelude to his fatal illness.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> New Orleans *Bee*, October 28, 1850. "Mr. McDonough, though 72 years old [actually he had not reached his seventy-first birthday], bore upon his face and figure the evidences of a green and vigorous old age, and looked, twenty-four hours before his death, as if he might have lived a century. His end is another salutary memento of the uncertainty of existence. He endured no cold gradation of decay, he received no timely and repeated warning of approaching dissolution. Death came upon him swiftly and irresistibly, and snapped the vital chain at the moment when its links seemed most firmly riveted [*sic*]." *Ibid.* The New Orleans *Daily True Delta*, October 27, 1850, vented its spleen on the dead man with the following harsh remarks: "this wealthy and well-known individual is no more—he has gone to his last account—the ruling passion strong in death, if not the proximate cause; for he died from a spasmodic attack, doubtless induced by a deficiency of raiment, in this wintry weather." A search by the author failed to locate the death certificate of McDonogh, hence medical proof of the cause of death must come only from newspaper accounts.

<sup>2</sup> Walker, "John McDonogh the Millionaire," *Continental Monthly* (New York), II (August, 1862), 165. The dates given by Walker are incorrect. McDonogh, perhaps because of declining health and belief that he had outlived the span of life allotted to men, voiced premonitions of his death. The editors of the *Daily Delta* "saw him . . . engaged in earnest negotiation and discussion with a brother millionaire, respecting some settlement which he desired to consummate ere he was called hence, and overheard him say in words which fell . . . with force and emphasis, 'My days are numbered, and my affairs must all be settled this side of the grave.'" New Orleans *Daily Delta*, October 27, 1850.



Thursday, October 24, 1850, was a cold, dry day, with just a hint of frost on the ground<sup>3</sup>—one of those rare, zestful days in a New Orleans autumn, when energy and the joy of living seem to course like wine through one's veins. McDonogh seemed in high spirits and good health when he entered the city that day; there was color in his cheeks, a sparkle in his brown eyes, and an elastic spring to his step. The apparent excellence of his physical condition was a source of congratulatory comment among his friends<sup>4</sup> and when he returned to McDonoghville that evening there was no reason to believe that death would soon claim him. Some time after supper that night he began to feel cramps and nausea severe enough to send him to bed. His condition grew rapidly worse; either late that night or early the following day his frightened servants called a physician whose "powerful remedies" of purging and bleeding undoubtedly hastened his death. When it was apparent that he was dying, Christian Roselius and other friends were called to his bedside.<sup>5</sup> No record of any words that fell from his lips during the checkered pattern of delirium and mental awareness that preceded his death has been preserved, but legend places in his mouth words of resignation for his fate and an assurance to Roselius that he was not afraid to die. During his last lucid moments he was supposed to have handed his will to Roselius, a circumstance denied by the *Commercial Bulletin*.<sup>6</sup> Between two and four o'clock in the afternoon of Saturday, October 26, 1850,<sup>7</sup> McDonogh breathed his last.

The *Daily Orleanian*, most bitter of all the many haters of McDonogh, exulted over his demise. "None," the paper trumpeted, "wished John McDonough to live; all were more or less anxious for his death, from the fact that it was only by his death they could hope for benefit!"<sup>8</sup> The subject of conversation everywhere in New Orleans, both on Saturday night and Sunday, was the death of McDonogh. An atmosphere of excited surprise and speculation hung over the city as paper after paper came forth with articles on the deceased millionaire. People could hardly believe that the familiar face and figure of their richest citizen would be seen no more on the streets of their city. From the pages of the *Daily Picayune* came a reflection of popular feeling:

<sup>3</sup> New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, October 26, 1850.

<sup>4</sup> New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, October 27, 1850.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> New Orleans *Commercial Bulletin*, October 28, 1850. The New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, October 27, 1850, declared that he had given his will to Roselius.

<sup>7</sup> The New Orleans *Republican*, August 17, 1873, gave the time as 2:30, but the New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, October 27, 1850, set the time at "about 4 o'clock."

<sup>8</sup> New Orleans *Daily Orleanian*, October 29, 1850.

The announcement yesterday evening of the death of John McDonogh took our city by surprise, and formed the sole subject of conversation wherever it was known. His long residence among us, his immense wealth, his peculiar habits and appearance, had made his name familiar, not only here but everywhere in the State, as a household word. He seemed to many a thing apart from his fellow-men. While youth, and strength, and health and beauty were year after year struck down beside him, he moved on, tall, spare, erect, with sprightly step and look. Every school urchin recognised [*sic*] at a first glance the thin, sharp, intelligent face, the small, sparkling brown eye, the long white hair . . . . We had gradually become impressed with the idea that John McDonogh would never die. He appeared as much an indestructable relic of our city's ancient history as the old State House or the old Cathedral. One of those antique monuments has been razed to the ground; the other has thrown off its old vesture for a new one, and the third, John McDonogh, now lies ready for his last journey and his last resting place—the tomb.<sup>9</sup>

Almost every newspaper in the Crescent City devoted space to obituary notices or articles on McDonogh and in nearly every case the papers were hostile, some quite vindictive in their denunciations of McDonogh's character. There is a jolting impact in the unmistakable hatred of the contemporary public for McDonogh. Most of New Orleans seemed to hate and despise him with a vengeance. One cannot avoid the conviction that resentment against McDonogh had been smoldering under the surface for a long time. Now that his death had removed fears of reprisal, his detractors had their say. The *Commercial Bulletin* was charitably brief in this respect, merely voicing the opinion that his death had not "elicited any special expressions of regret among his fellow citizens."<sup>10</sup>

"We are bound to admit," the *New Orleans Bee* declared, "that he maintained the character of a close, inflexible, money-loving and money-hoarding man. He did no outward good with his prodigious means, and his life was so unsocial and solitary—so unquickened and unrefreshed by the generous impulses of humanity, that he has gone to his last home without eliciting a single tear from friendship, or even a passing sigh from those who knew him. It is said, indeed, that his property will be

<sup>9</sup> *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, October 27, 1850.

<sup>10</sup> *New Orleans Commercial Bulletin*, October 28, 1850.

bequeathed, in a great measure, to sources of charity—a sort of tardy *post mortem* expiation for the short comings of a life of which the acquisition of wealth was the exclusive object.”<sup>11</sup> The *Louisiana Courier* labelled him a misanthrope and “repulsive yet approachable slave to business,” although it tried to balance the picture by praising his liberality as a slaveholder. “Whatever may have been Mr. McDonough’s love of money,” the paper declared, “there are few indeed of those who condemn his avarice who would have been even as humane and kind as he.”<sup>12</sup>

McDonogh’s tendency to construct plain buildings was denounced by the *Daily Delta*,<sup>13</sup> one of the papers which did a radical about-face when the contents of McDonogh’s will became known. On October 27, one day before the reading of the will, this paper told its readers: “Of enterprise, the spirit of public improvement and progress, he was as destitute as the old planks of his house were of sap. Owning immense property in the city, he left the greater part of it entirely unimproved, until his possessions became a great nuisance to the corporation. When induced to build, he would only erect the roughest and most unseemly buildings, usually put up by his slaves, who brought the bricks with which they were made across the river. Many of these buildings are now eyesores in our city, tenantless and dangerous from their dilapidated condition.” He was “one who worshipped Mammon with an unceasing and all-absorbing passion,” and “he was a hard, exacting man. In the prosecution of his rights, or in any relations of business, he knew no pity, no liberality, no kindness. What was ‘nominated in the bond,’ he would extort at every sacrifice.”<sup>14</sup>

“McDonogh was, as his whole life testifies,” shrilled the *Daily True Delta*, “a man of narrow mind and sordid soul, with a large dash of the fanatical, which, to men of his stamp, assumes the appearance of religion—of which, however, in the Apostolic sense, he was entirely destitute. He establishes this indisputably by his

<sup>11</sup> New Orleans *Bee*, October 28, 1850.

<sup>12</sup> New Orleans *Louisiana Courier*, October 28, 1850.

<sup>13</sup> New Orleans *Daily Delta*, November 1, 1850.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, October 27, 1850. The paper did admit that McDonogh would sometimes give to charitable causes. *Ibid.* After learning the contents of McDonogh’s will, the *Delta* softened its harsh attitude and even reversed itself. “His will shows that, throughout his long career of devoted, severe, mind and soul-wearing pursuit of wealth, he has been actuated and prompted by a philanthropic motive, a desire to benefit his species, to advance the cause of religion, virtue, and good morals. We believe that this feeling was a sincere one. No ambitious love of posthumous fame or notoriety appears to have mingled with this patriotic motive.” *Ibid.*, October 29, 1850.



affected reverence for the sacred writings, to the benign precepts of which, the practices of a life, exceeding the allotted years of man, were pointedly antagonistic."<sup>15</sup>

Two days after this article appeared, a correspondent of the *Daily Crescent* denounced caricatures of and attacks on McDonogh. "New Orleans," he argued, "should erect a suitable monument . . . to the memory of the man who had the noble courage to start in life, with a grand object of benevolence in view, to persevere with untiring determination and energy in carrying it into effect, to bear the 'whips and scorn of the times,' to practice a rigid self-denial, and steadfastly to the end pursue his object to the goal . . . Any monument would be poor, compared to the enduring one which will be found in the intelligence, virtue, and happiness of the countless thousands, whom his self-devotion and benevolence will have rescued from ignorance, vice, misery and crime.'"<sup>16</sup>

There were some who despised McDonogh even more heartily after the contents of his will were made public. The *Daily Orleanian* was the spokesman for this group and on October 31, 1850, launched the most vitriolic blast against the dead man that has ever been penned. He was savagely attacked as a bigot for failing to leave part of his estate to the Roman Catholic orphanages of the city. McDonogh was indirectly characterized as a "poor, contemptible biped . . . who, not satisfied with manifesting his illiberality while in life, permits himself, undivested of his bigotry, to be ushered into the presence of an unprejudiced God." McDonogh was "an educated man, and supposed to be superior to religious prejudices" yet he exhibited a "grovelling littleness of soul." In his will he discriminated between faiths and refused to distribute impartially "the moneys which he exactly screwed from his tenantry and the world." In hot anger the paper pointed an accusing finger at McDonogh's supposed cold disregard for the poor:

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<sup>15</sup> New Orleans *Daily True Delta*, October 30, 1850. By November 2, the *True Delta's* attitude had become more kindly. "McDonogh thought only of the people," it said in defense of his will, "and, with a sagacity, of which his previous life had furnished no evidence, disposed of his wealth in the manner best calculated to promote their welfare and secure their rights, by educating them to understand the first, and to vigilantly guard the second." *Ibid.*, November 2, 1850.

<sup>16</sup> New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, November 1, 1850. On October 28, 1850, the *Daily Crescent* urged a more Christian attitude toward McDonogh, and cautioned moderation: "those alone should scoff at his frailties and denounce his conduct, who can point to the performance of some act, proportioned to their means, which compares with his emancipation and education of" his Negroes.

Look at him, in imagination, day after day, as he hurriedly runs through the streets of our city, the better to avoid the semi-nude importuner for alms; to flee the houseless pauper and the penniless immigrant? Look at him, and say who can—who has ever, when the craving and gaunt beggar, shiveringly stood before this iron hearted man, and supplicated him for relief—who has ever known him to unbend himself—who has ever known him to extend aid to the wretched? To harken to the complaints of the agonized of heart—the sorely tried . . . . Canting conventiclers may prate of his philanthropy—write of his noble nature and generous heart; but the world, the discerning world, knows its falsity, and should nail the lie to the brazen temples of the utterers of such fustian."<sup>17</sup>

No extended wake, no elaborate funeral or eulogy marked the last rites for McDonogh; indeed, there seemed to have been undue haste in burying him, for little more than twenty-four hours elapsed between his death and his burial. The weather continued cold and dry that Sunday, and the winding road to the cemetery was dusty; the little moisture that fell on Friday had long since evaporated and the drought of several weeks continued.<sup>18</sup> Reverend James Whitall, pastor of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, officiated at the funeral, speaking from the pulpit of the little chapel in the slave quarters behind McDonogh's residence. McDonogh's slaves and some white dignitaries, among them James H. Leveridge, J. B. Watkins, Mayor A. D. Crossman, General Maurice Grivot, Christian Roselius, and John Spear Smith, occupied benches in the church, while on the grounds outside milled several hundred curious white and colored people.

McDonogh's body lay in an open casket, whether of metal or wood, the accounts of the funeral do not say, and his friends had an opportunity to gaze upon his sunken features. The ravages of the disease which killed him were visible in his complexion and in the skeleton-like appearance of his frame. The *Daily Orleanian*, October 29, 1850, tauntingly remarked that "even in death" he cheated the worms of "their usual feast, their grave

<sup>17</sup> New Orleans *Daily Orleanian*, October 31, 1850. Only the New Orleans *Daily True Delta*, October 27, 1850, approached the *Daily Orleanian* in vituperation. "The deceased was . . . disliked as a neighbor, regarded as a corruptor of the judiciary, a hard creditor, a miser, and, with affection of philanthropy, sought notoriety as an advocate of African colonization and civilization, by means of deported free people of color. Hypocrisy will not shed a tear upon his ashes—to which we wish eternal peace." *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, October 26, 28, 1850.

privileges, by presenting himself among them, devoid of flesh—with skin and bones alone, on which to hold their greedy, carnivorous regale!"<sup>19</sup>

McDonogh's slaves loved him, consequently his death filled their hearts with sorrow and their wailing pierced the cold autumn air. "Africa hung over his remains, and bewailed, in lugubrious howlings, his exist from this mundane sphere, and from the companionship of his fellows, whom he never benefitted!" the *Daily Orleanian* coldly reported. "No tear trembled in the eye, nor rolled down the cheek, of a solitary individual of Anglo-Saxon or European race. On the contrary, the chin quivered with the effort to suppress a smile; and the mouth, to attain a like end, was puckered!" Among some of the female slaves there was genuine sorrow for the loss of one who had been so kind to them. "Some of the younger females sobbed sorrowfully—wept tearfully—as the inanimate remains of their master, their preacher and friend, passed, for ever, from out the doors of the quaint, old habitation he had."<sup>20</sup>

The evening rays of an October sun splashed with color the creaking black hearse on which McDonogh's casket rested "and burnished, as if with molten gold, the western windows of the Hospital of Marines," as the slowly moving funeral procession wound its way along a path cut through the trees and dense undergrowth in the rear of McDonoghville. Reverend Whitall walked ahead, his head bent reverently downward, his hands clasping a bible. He was followed by Mayor Crossman and the pallbearers, two on each side of the hearse. Then came McDonogh's Negroes, wailing, shouting, gesticulating, making the most of a funeral, as only sincere, emotional black slaves could do. They were followed by prominent businessmen of the city; swelling the rear was a motley crowd of whites and colored people who had been drawn by the promise of a spectacle.<sup>21</sup>

At length the dusty funeral cortege entered the graveyard owned by McDonogh. It was a "wild and lonely cemetery, far removed from human ken and public egress." Only a few scattered graves, most of them weed-grown, shared the lonely isola-

<sup>19</sup> New Orleans *Daily Orleanian*, October 29, 1850. Most of the account of the funeral is taken from this article. Other remarks on McDonogh's funeral may be found in New Orleans *Louisiana Courier*, October 28, 1850; New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, October 29, 1850; New Orleans *Republican*, August 17, 1873. For proof that an Episcopalian clergyman buried McDonogh, see "Deaths Register, St. Anna's Episcopal Church Register, March 26, 1846 to January 28, 1867," p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> New Orleans *Daily Orleanian*, October 29, 1850.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*



tion with the recently constructed brick and mortar mausoleum that was to house McDonogh's remains; it was a desolate spot,<sup>22</sup> quite unlike the neatly kept, compact, and well-filled cemetery that exists today. After brief prayers, the casket was walled up in the tomb and the spectators dispersed. Darkness caught many of them still in the wooded graveyard "and they had to litterally [*sic*] grope their way through . . . on the many and circuitous paths which led to the public highway!"<sup>23</sup>

McDonogh's body remained only a few years in McDonoghville Cemetery; in accordance with the instructions left by him, his remains were placed in a lead casket and sent by ship to Baltimore. There is a legend that Edward (or James) Thornton, a former slave of McDonogh, secretly buried his mother, herself the oldest and most faithful of McDonogh's slaves, in the grave some time during the year 1887.<sup>24</sup> This might be true but no evidence of a reliable nature has yet been offered to substantiate it.

On June 5, 1858, Mayor Thomas Swann and the Baltimore City Council approved an ordinance authorizing the city's agents of the McDonogh estate to secure the transfer of McDonogh's remains to Baltimore.<sup>25</sup> Almost two years later, to the day, the mission was accomplished. The *Mary Clinton* arrived in Baltimore harbor June 4, 1860, "after a passage of sixteen days, from New Orleans, having on board the remains of the late John McDonogh, the millionaire. They were consigned to John Henderson & Co., who at once notified Mr. H. W. Jenkins"; the latter took them in charge and made all the necessary arrangements for the burial.<sup>26</sup>

While steps were being taken to construct a tomb, McDonogh's remains were temporarily placed in the Brantz Mayer family's vault in Greenmount Cemetery.<sup>27</sup> With \$2,000 appropriated by the

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* McDonoghville cemetery today is a pleasant city of the dead, located only a short distance from the Algiers landing of the Canal Street Ferry. One can reach it easily by taking a Gretna bus and alighting at a spot in front of the main entrance. A short walk brings one to the main gate over which is an arch of iron grillwork, bearing the words "McDonoghville Cemetery." About seventy-five yards from the gate stands the low, rectangular shaped tomb of greyish-white marble. A fence of heavy cast iron railings encircles the mausoleum and the ground between the tomb and its fence is paved. An American flag flies from a staff set in concrete near the grave.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Kendall, "New Orleans' Miser Philanthropist," *New Orleans Roosevelt Review* (July, 1943), 9. Some of the residents of McDonoghville believe that McDonogh's body still rests in the McDonoghville tomb. Mr. Andrew H. Kraus, manager of a grocery store at 738 Burmaster Street, Gretna, told the author on July 24, 1948, that he and others continued to believe this.

<sup>25</sup> *Ordinances of the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore, Passed at the January Session, 1858*, 1-43 (Baltimore, 1858), 110.

<sup>26</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, June 5, 1860. See also "Greenmount Cemetery Records, Baltimore," and J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Baltimore City & County* (Philadelphia, 1881), 270.

<sup>27</sup> "Greenmount Cemetery Records, Baltimore." In 1935 a question arose as to whether McDonogh's body was buried in Greenmount Cemetery. A search of the records failed to find any account of the burial, but authorities on Baltimore history finally demonstrated to their own satisfaction that he had been buried there in 1864. This information on the question of the location of McDonogh's body came from typed transcriptions of newspaper clippings enclosed in a letter of Martin Cornman to the author, September 13, 1949.

city ordinance of June 5, 1858, as a nucleus, a monument fund was created and in 1865 an impressive memorial, the work of Randolph of Baltimore, was completed. The monument consisted "of a circular slab 23 feet in diameter, surmounted by a 16-foot pedestal supporting the life-size figure of John McDonogh." The base was of granite, the pedestal and statue of marble. It was placed on one of the highest spots in Greenmount, "to the right centre of the main entrance."<sup>28</sup> Dedication of the monument took place July 31, 1865, with elaborate ceremonies featured by John Latrobe's speech.<sup>29</sup>

After the founding of McDonogh School near Baltimore, the pupils made annual pilgrimages to Greenmount Cemetery, where they honored McDonogh's memory with songs and the presentation of flowers. It was only natural that in time the school's trustees should consider the possibility of bringing the monument and remains to the school campus, a logical site for the final resting place of the man whose bequest brought into life the splendid educational institution. Active interest in the proposed transfer became evident about 1927 and was culminated in 1945, when the transfer was finally made.

Councilman Kelley, president of the Baltimore City Council, introduced, October 8, 1945, a resolution to authorize the removal of the monument and remains to McDonogh School. Sixteen days later Ordinance Number 257 was passed by the Council. According to the provisions of this regulation, Greenmount Cemetery was to pay \$5,170 for dismantling the monument, moving it and re-erecting it on the school campus. In return, the Cemetery corporation was to receive, from the trustees and Baltimore city, a clear and full title to the plot of ground on which the monument formerly stood in Greenmount.<sup>30</sup> Hilgarten Marble Company, in cooperation with Rullman and Wilson Company, moved and reassembled the monument.<sup>31</sup> Mr. Walter Brooks Bradley supervised the removal of the remains. He told the author that

<sup>28</sup> *Baltimore Evening Sun*, November 27, 1945; Scharf, *History of Baltimore City & County*, 270; *Baltimore Sun*, August 1, 1865.

<sup>29</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, July 31, August 1, 1865. The latter issue contained Latrobe's speech. He talked about McDonogh's life and work, his character, his will, and the manumission scheme made famous by the philanthropist. Part of his address was devoted to the white supremacy concept of race relations. *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> "Baltimore City Ordinance Number 257, October 24, 1945"; *Baltimore Sun*, October 9, 1945.

<sup>31</sup> *Week*, McDonogh School, LXIII (November 16, 1945), 41.

McDonogh's body, reduced to skeletal condition, lay in a badly corroded soft lead casket, on which was a plate engraved with McDonogh's name.<sup>32</sup>

Something of the excitement which prevailed at McDonogh School after Major Louis Lamborn revealed the plans for the transfer of the monument and remains can be gathered from the school newspaper, in articles that crackle with the electrifying current of happy expectation. "In response to an appeal made by Major Lamborn for voluntary labor, cadets, faculty, and staff excavated [for] the foundation in the clear space on the lawn in front of the east end of the dining room in 24 hours. The concrete base was then constructed and several days later the monument arrived in sections at McDonogh for erection at the new site." So eager were some of the cadets to participate in the task of setting up the beloved Founder's memorial, that they began digging before five o'clock in the morning.<sup>33</sup> Before the month was over, the task was completed and the *Evening Sun* proclaimed: "An eighteen-year old dream of McDonogh School trustees has finally come true. The remains of John McDonogh, whose bequest founded the school, and the . . . monument with his epitaph, have been moved from the lot in Greenmount Cemetery to an eminence on the campus of the school."<sup>34</sup>

New Orleans was far more tardy in erecting a memorial to McDonogh, not because she was lacking in gratitude—the city has always been known for its generous heart—but because of such circumstances as litigation, war, reconstruction, and chaotic conditions arising from these factors. Almost from the day of McDonogh's funeral, unpleasant occurrences began to disturb the picture, as if omens of future disaster were crowding fast on the scene. It all began with a daring, coolly executed robbery of McDonogh's house on the night of Monday, October 28, 1850. The residence had been padlocked by city authorities to safeguard its contents prior to the appointment of administrators, but the

<sup>32</sup> Telephone conversation of the author with Walter Brooks Bradley, August 25, 1949.

<sup>33</sup> *Week*, LXIII, November 9, 15, 30, 1945. McDonogh's remains, in their lead casket, were placed in a vault under the monument. The casket was delivered to McDonogh School on November 15, 1945. See "Greenmount Cemetery Records, Baltimore."

<sup>34</sup> *Baltimore Evening Sun*, November 27, 1945. McDonogh's wish that he be buried with his parents so that his ashes might mingle with theirs, has never been carried out. Elizabeth McDonogh died on June 16, 1808, and McDonogh Senior on March 19, 1809. They were "buried in Westminster Church Cemetery, Fayette and Greene Streets, Baltimore, close to the tomb of Edgar Allan Poe." See Childs, *John McDonogh*, 3, 25, n. 1., and McDonogh family list, John Minor Wisdom Collection of McDonogh Papers.



thieves, six in number, including a McDonogh slave who aided them, gained entrance to McDonogh's rooms via a ladder placed against a second floor window in the rear of the house.<sup>35</sup>

Evidently the robbers had been patiently waiting for an opportunity to steal the rich hoards of money it was rumored McDonogh kept in his house. One or more of the criminal band, in addition to the disloyal slave, seemed familiar with McDonogh's activities and knew that he had large sums of cash in the house at that time of year in order to pay taxes and other annual expenses. James Thornton, slave and confidential servant of McDonogh, became suspicious of another McDonogh Negro, Jerry, who was spending money freely. An investigation by James showed him that something was amiss, a fact proved when he clapped Jerry into irons and forced the frightened culprit to confess that two men from Algiers and three from New Orleans had committed the crime. Thornton immediately reported it to Judge Aikman and then to Christian Roselius. A tin container and iron strong box, both rifled of their contents, were discovered in nearby fields. Mutilated letters and papers were also recovered. The thieves had overlooked \$100,000 in First Municipality bonds. Because of the importance of the crime, Mayor Crossman assigned Captain Youenes, High Constable of the First Municipality, to the case. Almost immediately, he arrested Gregorie Constant, owner of an Algiers grocery store.<sup>36</sup>

With Jerry's confession and description of his accomplices, the police were able to move swiftly. A Negro woman named Botts was questioned; Jerry claimed that he had given her his share of the loot, but she denied it. One José Figera was taken into custody although no incriminating evidence was found on his person. On November 2, 1850, another suspect, Frank Couci, was apprehended. The first real break in the case came with the recovery of \$224 and two gold watches of McDonogh's in the room of Francisco Gancillo. Other suspects soon joined these men in the city jail. A reward of \$500 was offered for the recovery of certain

<sup>35</sup> "Inventory of McDonogh Estate," 5; *New Orleans Bee*, October 31, 1850. It is surprising that a man rumored to be as wealthy and miserly as McDonogh was not robbed several times during his lifetime. One robbery was planned in 1838, but McDonogh was forewarned by a friend and apparently nothing happened. See A. R. McNair to McDonogh, August 27, 1838, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>36</sup> *New Orleans Bee*, October 31, November 1, 1850; "Inventory of McDonogh Estate," 5.

papers, including \$116,000 of First Municipality bonds.<sup>37</sup> Interest in the case died out, hence the full ending of the story failed to find its place in the newspapers of the day. Most of the bonds, papers, and money seemed to have been recovered, but the fate of the thieves is obscure.

In due time this unpleasant episode was forgotten, but not so the Civil War and Reconstruction. However, time heals most wounds and New Orleans rebounded from defeat and despair to regain a measure of the joyous prosperity she once knew. It was then that she began to give serious thought of honoring the man responsible for many of her public schools. Andrew H. Wilson, a member of the Orleans Parish School Board, first broached the idea of a monument fund—a suggestion which found favor with the Board. In a resolution at its December, 1891 meeting, the Board approved the plan and set the first Friday in May of each year as Founder's Day, when the school children of New Orleans would be asked to contribute to a fund for the monument. Wilson headed the monument fund committee with Nemours Bienvenu and William C. Faust (replaced by C. L. DeFuentes in 1892) as co-workers.<sup>38</sup>

The first collection for the monument was made in 1892 and the last in 1898, during which period of six years \$7,400, including interest had been accumulated.<sup>39</sup> Such was the sum created by the pennies and nickels of grateful school children. "Not another cent has gone into the fund," declared the *Daily Picayune* on the one hundred and nineteenth anniversary of McDonogh's birth, "but what was contributed by the children in small amounts."<sup>40</sup>

A call to artists to submit designs for the memorial brought entries from R. H. Perry, Alexander Doyle, Herbert Adams, Attilio Piccirilli, and Furio Piccirilli. Attilio's design was chosen over the others. As models the sculptor used Lucille Toujan, a pupil of McDonogh Number 15 School, and Edwin Bienvenu White, a student at McDonogh Number 9. These two children were the

<sup>37</sup> New Orleans *Bee*, November 1, 4, 27, 1850; February 11, 1851.

<sup>38</sup> New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, December 29, 1898.

<sup>39</sup> New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, May 8, 1892; December 29, 1898; Baltimore *Sun*, May 11, 1897.

<sup>40</sup> New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, December 29, 1898.

winners of spelling contests designed to select the boy and girl who would have the honor of posing as models for the memorial.<sup>41</sup>

Originally, the monument was to be placed in McDonogh Park on Toledano Street, just off St. Charles. This proposed site was abandoned when a dispute arose between those favoring City Park and those who saw Audubon's spacious grounds as a suitable location. As a compromise, Lafayette Square was chosen.<sup>42</sup> There the memorial stands today, on a circular, raised plot of ground, facing the Grecian facade of City Hall across St. Charles Street. In the rear of the monument Henry Clay stands with outstretched hand, strangely forelorn and out of place in the square.

The memorial is of marble and bronze. Three octagonal-shaped slabs of marble, cut so that each succeeding one is smaller than the one below, form the base for a pedestal of smooth white marble. A modified Corinthian capital, with gracefully curling acanthus leaves, completes the support for the bronze bust of McDonogh. A little girl stands at the base of the monument, looking up at a barefoot boy who stands on tiptoe and with his left hand high over his head places a wreath before the bust of his benefactor. The boy stands on a marble tablet bearing the inscription:

To  
John McDonogh  
From The  
Public School Children  
of New Orleans  
1892-1898

The girl clasps the boy's right hand tightly in her own, as if to support his arching body. McDonogh Monument was unveiled on

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*; "Up and Down the Street," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March 3, 1950, traced the whereabouts of the two pupils who had posed for the memorial and learned that Lucille Toujan was now Mrs. Louis C. Heintz. Edwin Bienvenu White died on August 9, 1941. There will be a gala centennial celebration this Founder's Day, May 5, 1950. Writers, dignitaries, surviving descendants of McDonogh, descendants of his slaves, and others will be present. Harnett Kane, author of *Pathway to the Stars*, a biographical novel of McDonogh which is to be published on the centennial of McDonogh's death, will also be present. *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, December 29, 1898. A bronze bust of McDonogh on a pedestal rests on Toledano Street, just off St. Charles Street, near the House of Bultman.



December 29, 1898,<sup>43</sup> and since then has been the focal point of a brilliant series of Founder's Day services.<sup>44</sup>

Pictures, busts, and monuments of McDonogh thus exist in two cities, Baltimore and New Orleans. The sculptor Repetto made a bust of McDonogh, using a miniature in oil as his model.<sup>45</sup> This bust has been copied several times. The miniature itself cannot be located, but a large copy of it, showing McDonogh as a handsome young man, hangs in the administration building of McDonogh School, near Baltimore. A portrait of McDonogh as an old man may be found at McDonogh School and also in the rare book room of Howard-Tilton Memorial Library. McDonogh is seated in an old-fashioned high-backed chair, and has his right leg crossed over his left. His loosely clasped hands rest in his lap. On the table beside him rest his hat and several books. The handle of the ever-present umbrella can also be seen. J. Dabour painted this portrait in 1889. In the receptionist's room of the Mayor's office, New Orleans City Hall, hangs another portrait of McDonogh, the work of Helene Maas in 1890.

In spite of his many failings, McDonogh laid the foundations for a great educational philanthropy, and in recognition of his benevolence monuments of stone and metal perpetuate his fame. He is one of those heroes of public education, deserving of an honored niche in philanthropy's hall of fame. His fond desire to immortalize his name has been successful, perhaps even beyond his rosiest dreams. But, without any deliberate design on his part, he enshrined his name indelibly on the pages of Louisiana legal history, through the agency of his remarkable last will and testament, a document worthy of extended study in its own right and the catalyst which precipitated one of the most famous legal struggles ever to take place in the Deep South.

<sup>43</sup> New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, December 29, 1898; New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, December 29, 1898.

<sup>44</sup> According to legend, flowers are not placed on McDonogh's mausoleum in McDonoghville Cemetery, because the authorities feel that it might be rendering honor to the slave woman supposed to be buried there. This legend is without basis in fact, because some of the school pupils on the right bank of the river do put flowers on the tomb on Founder's Day. Mr. C. E. Steidtmann, principal of Behrman High School, verified this for the author in an interview. Belleville School sends the pupils of kindergarten, and grades 1, 2, and 3; Schwarz School sends all of its pupils, as does McDonogh 26 in Jefferson Parish.

<sup>45</sup> Fulson, "Some Studies in the Life of John McDonogh," 81-82.

McDonogh's death came as a surprise to New Orleans and furnished an exciting subject of conversation for days. Nearly every paper in the city took advantage of the opportunity to discuss his career, his will, and his character. The biting sarcasm and bitterly critical comments of most of the articles reflected vividly the public dislike for one considered to be a grasping miser. Deliberately flaunted eccentricities, combined with a rumored fabulous fortune that rarely seemed to be employed for public good or charity, fanned the flames of public resentment. Many people were glad to hear of his death, for it meant the end of one whom they regarded as a cold-blooded oppressor. The few voices raised in McDonogh's defense, the occasional brave prophecy that he would bequeath his fortune to charity, were drowned out in the chorus of harsh criticism.

As the time for the reading of his will approached, public curiosity rose to fever pitch. Hundreds of wild guesses as to its nature were made and estimates of his fortune ranged from \$4,000,000 to \$15,000,000. When his charitable bequests were revealed, public opinion changed; men began to regret that they had despised McDonogh before. Some tried to make amends by writing glowing tributes; others, by defending his will against the lawyers gleefully preparing to make a legal football of it.

Baltimore erected the first monument to McDonogh in 1865 and long honored the remains of the philanthropist after they were shipped from New Orleans in 1860. The Trustees of McDonogh School finally won the right to transfer the remains and the monument to the campus of the school and this was done in November, 1945.

New Orleans unveiled its memorial to McDonogh in 1898, in Lafayette Square opposite the City Hall. Unlike Baltimore, which holds its Founder's Day Services on November 21 of each year, New Orleans has chosen the first Friday in May. Services in New Orleans are on a larger scale than in Baltimore. Due to the fact that there is only one McDonogh School and it is located a few miles outside the city limits, knowledge of and interest in

McDonogh is not general in Baltimore. On the other hand, nearly every public school child and his parents in New Orleans either has heard of McDonogh, or has participated in a Founder's Day service, or knows a few of the facts of his life.



## VETERANS VERSUS CHURCHWARDENS

*By SIMONE DE LA SOUCHÈRE DELÉRY*

Spring was too short. After masked balls and Mardi Gras colorful cavalcades popularized by Creole students back from Paris, came the gruesome procession of tumbrils carting away foul smelling corpses. It was like Orcagna's fresco depicting brilliant cavaliers suddenly facing skeletons at the entrance of a wood, or like one of those dialogues between "the quick and the dead" familiar to mediaeval people.

Reverend Theodore Clapp, minister of the First Presbyterian Church of New Orleans, hastened from house to house, he and his Catholic colleagues bringing spiritual comfort to yellow fever's victims. Entering a room, he raised a mosquito bar, introduced himself, bent toward the sick man to hear his question. Distinctly, the words came to his ears: "What do you think of Napoleon?"

A few hours later, Clapp returned and saw that the feverish man had only a few hours to live. Close to him, in the pestilential air, he asked what his last wish was. "Pray to God," the moribund answered "that in the celestial regions I may enjoy the sight and the company of the greatest and best man who ever lived, the Emperor Napoleon."

After he went back to New England, the minister mentioned this incident in his book relating memories left by thirty-five years of his ministering to Orleanians. He failed to identify the man otherwise than by saying that he was one of Napoleon's greatest admirers and had changed his house into a museum filled with relics of the Imperial era. Was he former mayor Nicholas Girod? Was he Pierre Caillou from Bergerac, the ebullient Gascon? Was he . . . ? Names come to the mind, names of Creoles as well as of Frenchmen. The year this death took place was not recorded either and the fact there was an epidemic does not add any precision. Epidemics were so frequent. They struck people of all ages, all classes, all colors.

So did the Napoleonic fever. However, if a typical period had to be selected to locate the incident related by Clapp, the best fitted for it would be the forties. By that time, the changing of Napoleon into a legendary hero had reached its climax.

"Every one wishes that Napoleon's body be brought back to France," so Pierre Cherbonnier had written in a textbook composed for New Orleans school boys. It was to satisfy public opinion all over the world that Louis-Philippe urged by Thiers had been anxious to grant the St. Helena prisoner's last wish. "I want my body to rest near the Seine among my beloved French people." England was only too glad to satisfy this demand. It was less costly than making concessions in the Eastern problems always pregnant with complications.

As soon as news of the transfer reached the United States, New Orleans's *cabinets de lecture* well provided with New York, Boston and Philadelphia newspapers besides the local *gazettes*, were more than ever invaded by the exiles. Indeed, Buisson, Gally and others experienced a fresh feeling of nostalgia in reading headlines that brought back memories. Such reading stirred up anew the regret not to be in Paris, not to be standing at attention when the Little Corporal's body would pass.

"We are a group of old soldiers of the Imperial Army who have exchanged our swords for ploughs and have left the tumult of camps for peaceful retreats on the banks of the Mississippi . . ." Thus began a letter that the *Bee* received from the *Conté d'Acadie* in Southern Louisiana. The gratitude toward Louis-Philippe was not however without reservation. Why had a mere frigate with such a ridiculous name as *La Belle Poule* (The Beautiful Hen) been sent to St. Helena when a whole fleet should have been dispatched?

In New Orleans, an appeal was extended to all Frenchmen "naturalized or not", in view of organizing a great ceremony which would take place as soon as the news that Napoleon's body had arrived in Paris would reach Louisiana. The veterans recalled the events which had taken place nineteen years before. Their old uniforms would not fit anymore but they would dress as Legionnaires and display their medals and experience the same emotion.

This emotion was spreading to Americans. Again, as at the time of Waterloo, their own political problems revived their Bonapartist feelings. England was looking threateningly at the United States' progress toward Mexico and this was enough to cause a surge of anti-British opinion among Louisianians. They wrote songs and poems in which the word Napoleon furnished an easy rime for Albion. The former was synonymous of all that was

glorious, the latter represented all that was despicable. As at the beginning of the century American patriotism and admiration for the Emperor merged and produced the atmosphere of excitement in which news from Paris was received.

To a greater extent even than in 1821—as newspapers were more numerous and larger—articles about the Imperial era appeared daily in the Louisiana press. In the parishes veterans provided anecdotes. In a village of the Northern part of the State, a Lutheran minister announced that he would speak three times a week, by candlelight "*du caractère, des mœurs et des manières de l'Empereur Napoléon et de sa femme Joséphine*." This preacher who gave such a large share to Caesar in God's house was J. J. Lehmanowsky, a former colonel of a Polish regiment of the *Grande Armée*, who as a *demi-solde* had settled in Louisiana.

"Beautiful as glory, cold as a tomb", said Victor Hugo of the day of the funeral in Paris. It took three months for the full description of the ceremony to reach New Orleans. One learned that four hundred women had worked for weeks to make black and silver draperies, that dignitaries of all countries had attended the funeral service except England whose Ambassador had failed to appear. What else could have been expected from Albion?

Louisianians were too far away to hear of some disappointing aspects of the ceremony, the pettiness of the bourgeois King, the resentment of the Prince of Joinville at having been chosen for what he called the role of an undertaker. The worst of that seemed to be the interruption of his affair with an Opera dancer whom the Parisians had not failed to nickname *La Belle Poule*. This amused the Orleanians, although they blamed Joinville for his lack of enthusiasm. Marshal Bertrand had considered it an enviable honor to be a member of the expedition. But Bertrand of course, was another type of man.

Hotel St. Louis was a large and stately building containing a stock exchange, a hotel, rooms for auction sales or meetings. There, on the 10th of January, at eleven o'clock, "*heure militaire*" as the *Courrier de La Louisiane* had said, a group of veterans gathered to plan a ceremony honoring their Emperor. The French Consul won the ex-soldiers' hearts when he refused the presidency of the committee. "I am only an admirer of Napoleon", he must have said "some one who had the honor to serve under him should preside." The men looked at each other, decided to vote. Unani-



mously, Benjamin Buisson was elected. Gravely, he gave his thanks and promised to do his best. There seemed to be no resentment for his abandonment of the old quarter when, as a pioneer, he had moved to the new section of the city. He remained the leader of the Frenchmen from France.

But those Frenchmen from France were adopting the American custom of forming committees and subcommittees. Some of them were needed to take care of all donations. Not only money was offered. A carpenter donated the wood and the hours of work necessary to build a cenotaph, emulating the church-builders of medieval times. Monsignor Blanc, the archbishop, would officiate at a pontifical mass for the repose of the soul of the Emperor. All the Legion corps would assemble at seven o'clock on the morning of March 21st. The newspapers printed a postage stamp size picture of the uniforms which would be worn—the Jaegers, the Carabinieri, the Cazadores, the Irish Guards and others. An imposing force of ushers was selected. A wide crepe band on their left arms, they would check the invitations at the gate of St. Louis Cathedral.

It was this last detail which precipitated the storm. On the very morning of the 21st, the newspapers announced that on account of a disagreement between the organizers of the ceremony and the churchwardens the funeral service was indefinitely postponed. The citizens were startled. They had expected a procession, some kind of grandiose affair. Why this disappointment? Through the veterans' invectives and their adversaries' clumsy excuses they learned what had caused it.

"All Christians—or rather all inhabitants of the city—have the right to enter a church" the wardens had stated and for twenty years or more the wardens' word was the law. The ushers declared that they would follow the orders received. Attempts at mediation were repulsed by haughty wardens and obstinate veterans. All excited, Benjamin Buisson was running from one camp to the other. Boiling with rage, he had to announce the final decision. His Imperial Majesty would have to do without a mass but his soldiers would not yield their positions. Referring to the elaborate preparations which had come to naught a newspaper editor sarcastically commented that it was like the fable of the mountain giving birth to a mouse.

What was the real cause of this failure? Were the wardens so thoroughly democratic or so pious that the idea of the entrance to the cathedral being denied for an hour to uninvited persons would stir up their indignation? It was more likely that the Frenchmen's defeat was the result of a hostile undercurrent. Only a month before, the Native American party, which soon would shorten its name to the American party had held its State convention in New Orleans. Its members' opposition was directed more against the Irish and the German immigrants, yet, sometimes it spread to others, especially to the non-Protestant group. Many of the Napoleonic exiles were Masons but officially they belonged to the Roman Catholic Church and for this reason were distrusted by the Native American. The disagreement about the funeral service furnished an opportunity to stir up dissensions among the Catholics.

"Are you going to take orders from foreigners?" some one must have insinuated to the wardens always anxious to preserve their authority. The veterans were burning up with rage. They were losing their prestige, a prestige which had increased with the growing of the Bonapartist opinion. It had been the fashion for some years among local poets to offer Napoleon's old soldiers, the *grogards*, as examples of all patriotic virtues.

Such praise went up to the veterans' heads. One of them, with a fiery Southern imagination, Prosper Foy, formerly from Bordeaux and St. Domingue became quite intoxicated by then. Neither the cares of his plantation, nor his childless home were enough to occupy his time. He used to supply a local review, *Le Bon Sens*, with poems and songs. On his visits to New Orleans where another type of attraction lured him, he used to bring to the *Bee* articles and patriotic refrain "Napoléon, la patrie et l'honneur!"

One of his articles caused a violent storm. Very boldly, Prosper Foy had stated that on the Chalmette battlefield some American officers "with an utter disregard for the laws of war" had given the order to shoot at a messenger sent by the enemy. Luckily, according to the author, a chivaleresque Frenchman, Major de St. Geme ran to General Jackson and reminded him that an emissary has sacred rights.

Whether the incident had happened could not be ascertained but, at any rate, Foy's faux pas started a debate which was not beneficial to the Frenchmen. This incident had occurred a month only before the date marked for the St. Louis Cathedral ceremony and very likely was partly responsible for its failure. However, hostility against some of the ex-soldiers did not seem to be detrimental to the growing enthusiasm for the memory of the former Emperor. On March 21, 1840, the cenotaph built by the devoted carpenter Giraudon stood in an empty church but the Orleanians expressed their feelings in another way. The Orleans Theater showed a drama in five tableaux "*Napoléon à Ste Hélène*" while at the American Theater the favorite actor played the main part in "*Napoléon ou Vive l'Empereur!*" Newspapers did not fail to mention that both spectacles would end with the singing of the Marseillaise.

On the same day, the *Bee* printed twenty-four stanzas dedicated to the "intrepid warrior". This ode depicting Napoleon as greater than the giants of all centuries—even greater than "old Adamastor"—was based on a theme growing more popular every day. The funeral ceremony had been a failure but the Napoleonic legend was entering its literary phase in Louisiana.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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**A LA POURSUITE DES AIGLES:** By Simone de la Souchère Deléry, 314 pp. Paris, New York and Montreal: Le Cercle du Livre de France. \$2.

Much of the history of Louisiana is the story of the French adventurers, expatriates, and refugees who for one reason or another came to settle in the New World. Almost all of these groups have attracted the attention of historians, poets or novelists. "Why is it," the author asks in the Introduction to this book, "that the restless Bonapartists who settled in Louisiana have remained anonymous? Surely it should be interesting to inquire into the history of these men, who came to a strange country not as conquerors but as refugees: What sort of welcome did they meet with? What were their reactions to their new environment and what contribution did they make to their new homeland?"

Mme Deléry has presented the results of her researches on this subject in an able as well as entertaining book, which is equally remarkable for its scrupulous scholarship and its literary excellence. In fact, the subject lends itself admirably to literary treatment and the author has set forth her material in a narrative form, by using as the central theme of the work the life story of one of the Napoleonic exiles who settled in Louisiana.

Pierre Benjamin Buisson—a name already known to students of Louisiana history—was like many others a voluntary exile: although restored to the rank of artillery lieutenant which he formerly held in the *Grande Armée*, he found the new Bourbon regime uncongenial to his republican spirit and elected to try his fortune in New Orleans, where he arrived on Christmas Eve 1817 when a young man of twenty-four years. He immediately found the atmosphere sympathetic and to his liking, not only on account of the French culture of the new place, but because the native Creoles seemed to be as staunchly Bonapartist as he was; and although he retained his French citizenship, he settled and married here, and died in New Orleans at the age of eight-one without ever having revisited his native land. During his lifetime he engaged in a variety of activities, and contributed in large measure to the culture and growth of his adopted country: he was a practising architect, surveyor and engineer, he became

editor for a time of the *Courrier de Natchitoches*, he joined Boimare in the printing business in the *Imprimerie de Buisson et Boimare*, he later became official surveyor of the cities of Lafayette and Jefferson and played a part in the development of some of the uptown subdivisions, he was identified with the military life of the City and was for many years Commandant of the Orleans Battalion. Throughout this period, he maintained a close friendship with the other Napoleonic exiles in Louisiana and was a leading figure in most of their activities.

Of the many other exiles and former soldiers of Napoleon who adorn these pages, there were some who, like Lakanal or Dr. Antommarchi, made only a brief appearance on the scene; others, like the vigorous and impulsive Humbert, who expended their restless energies in new adventures; but most of them, like Buisson, established themselves as permanent residents of their new country and became more and more identified with its life and culture. All these men have been gathered together here for the first time in their proper relation to each other and to the undying Bonapartist spirit which was their common bond.

Indeed, the history of the Bonapartist cult in Louisiana is in large measure the story of French life and civilization in the State, and particularly in the City of New Orleans, during the first six or seven decades of the nineteenth century. Mme Deléry may justly claim to be the first historian who has treated all aspects of the subject in a comprehensive and connected manner.

There is an immense amount of material in this work, much of which is new and has been derived from family manuscripts and documents, as well as contemporary newspapers and periodicals. All this material, new and old, has been combined and woven together with great skill and in a systematic, orderly manner, and scholars and students will find it an exhaustive and authoritative work of reference on the subject.

However, for all the painstaking research and sound scholarship that went into the making of this book, it is by no means only a dry work of reference. It is a literary work, intended for the enjoyment as well as the instruction of the intelligent reader, whether layman or scholar. Indeed, it has been called a historical novel, although this is scarcely an accurate description. There are a few instances, as the author herself states in the Introduction, in which she has conjectured the reactions of some of her charac-

ters to their environment; however, the characters are real and the environment factual, and as these minor variations from documented fact have been sparingly resorted to, they may pass muster as a legitimate exercise of the imagination in a work of this kind.

Mme Deléry possesses a vigorous and incisive prose style, illumined by flashes of wit and humor, with an unusual talent for vivid and picturesque description. At the same time, however, it is obvious that the author is primarily a student and a scholar, and that she has exercised meticulous care in drawing a true and faithful picture of Louisiana life that will give to many readers a new and more accurate idea of what the City and State were like during the last century.

This book has been selected by its publishers, *Le Cercle du Livre de France* as their book of the month for December 1950. As such it should receive a wide circulation in New York and other parts of the United States, in Canada, and in France, and should serve to interest many new readers in the history of our City and State. It is to be hoped that an English translation will be forthcoming so as to make it available to those who are not familiar with the French language.

Rene J. Le Gardeur, Jr.





